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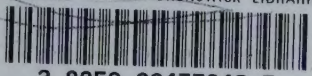

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THE RIM OF THE TUB

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THE RIM OF THE TUB

Elizabeth A. Scott

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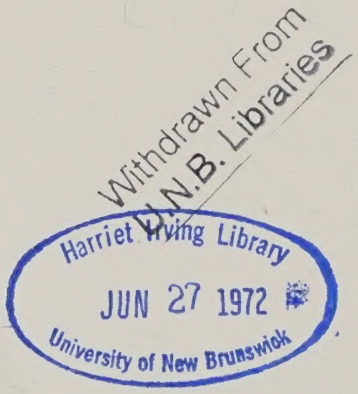

To my family

THE RIM OF THE TUB

No one ate much. Except our overnight guest, Mr. Friendly Policeman. He ate three pieces of toast and marmalade, and he would have eaten an egg if it had been offered to him. Ginnie drank coffee and smoked, leaning both arms from the elbows down on the table so that her cigarette smoke rose on a nice little angle right into Mr. Friendly Policeman's face. But he didn't say anything. Just put his napkin up and coughed discreetly, pretending it was a crumb in his throat. I sat and watched Ginnie. I had thought my sister Ginnie would be a lion this morning. Or perhaps she would put on a cat face. Delicate and self-contained. I was surprised when she came in and sat down to breakfast as herself. Mr. Endearing Policeman wiped his mouth and tilted his head back to admire our rafters. Well, this was just another job to him I suppose. Then he looked at his watch, and Ginnie stubbed out her cigarette, and went to fetch her coat. Mr. Endearing Doctor smiled with his anemic blue eyes and said to me, "Well, David. It looks as though we have a very pleasant day for our journey." And he articulated very clearly so that I would have no difficulty reading his lips, because I am David, and David is very, very deaf you see. David doesn't hear anything. Before David was born, long before he came through the red, fleshy door into the bedroom on the second floor he was made to choose a sorrow. In the dark of his mother's belly the fat, colored disks were splayed out and David chose one. He chose white. The white of silence, and when the gate into the second-floor bedroom was spread wide and groaning, David passed through, bringing with him the white disk of sorrow. David looked out of the kitchen window. The sky was blue. There was just a little breeze. And it looked as though once the sun got going it would shine strong and clear. But David had no idea what sort of weather was fine weather for a journey to a Mental Institution. In thirty years the white disk of silence, which I have worn as a talisman, had never taught me that. Mr. Endearing Policeman mistook my shrug for sullenness, and he leaned over the table and patted my hand. "Come, come," he very clearly said, "it isn't as bad as all that, Greenacres is really a very nice place. You will see.

It is really very nice indeed. It isn't an asylum, or anything of that nature you know." I removed my hand and put it safely under the table out of his reach. I was not very much cheered.

When I was declared mentally incontinent it had to be done quickly, and with the evidence that was drummed up I didn't have a prayer of getting into an asylum, where at least one comes up against some strange and grand delusions. All the facts in my case were pretty colorless. There was a Christ figure with an erection to be considered. I once carved it and showed it to the vicar's wife. And the fact that I write letters to dead people, because dead people are my friends, or my friends are dead people, translate it as you will. And then of course there is Ginnie. My sister Ginnie, to whom I suppose I have strangely taught strange things since mother was killed in a very willful collision with a sled runner. With all this woefully little evidence all they could award me was the Greenacres Rest Home for the Mentally Disturbed, where the ground is always covered with damp and rotting leaves. Where the patients, inflicted with niggling and long drawn out neuroses, carry sugar pills and nasal sprays in their dressing gown pockets. Where the breath grows stale between bed and an endless game of checkers. Where the smell of cooking permeates the sun porch, and the dressing gowns, and the checkerboards and the beds.

It has been my habit to put all emotionally charged prospects into perspective with the help of two perfect and naturally formed right angles which I found lying on the beach imprisoned in a piece of quartz. I called the quartz Stone and carried it in my right-hand pocket, comforted by the natural logic which Stone contained. But our overnight guest Mr. Medical Escort has taken Stone away because it has sharp edges. So this morning I tried to diminish Greenacres with the help of the tablecloth, although the red and white checks were poor substitutes for two times ninety crystalline degrees. I aligned my saucer and the edge of my plate. Then my butter knife trembled very slightly for about six seconds and I knew that Ginnie was opening the garage doors.

Mr. Deliver Me Safely scraped back his chair and put on the gabardine raincoat which overshot his shoulders, wrists and knees in the manner approved by all respectable but sinister persons, such as plainclothesmen and doctors disguised as travelling companions. He tried to get up the nerve to offset the raincoat impression with a rust-colored Harris tweed cap. He took the cap out of his pocket and flattened it and fingered it as though he meant to put it on, but at the last minute his courage failed him. He rolled the cap up in his hand and picked up his overnight case. I put on my overcoat and we went outside.

* * *

The Kingdom House in which, up until this morning, I have lived and which is still my sister Ginnie's home is surrounded by the sea. The Kingdom House is built on rock. The lawn, the dahlias, the rose trellis, the vegetable garden, everything except the cherry tree (which has found a secret rooting place) is growing on rock. In a dry year we measure the level of the rainwater tank in the attic with a frayed yellow tape measure and everything (except the cherry tree) dies.

Once upon a time, when my mother was alive enough to receive them, letters addressed Mrs. Marion Olivier, Kingdom House, Island, were flown across from the Mainland (which could be either England or France, although France is closer), brought up in the bus from town to the bakery grocery butcher shop hardware store and haberdashery Parish Post Office. And at an hour convenient to him George Labot the postman baker grocer butcher and ironmonger (his daughter took care of haberdashery) climbed on his bicycle and pedaled across the granite causeway to the Kingdom House carrying my mother's letter in his saddlebag, his pocket or his teeth, depending. But my mother died, the causeway was destroyed and George Labot has grown too old to ride a bicycle. And anyway his daughter, who now takes care of everything including the haberdashery, has long since stopped being obliging to the queer people who live in the Kingdom House. So my parcels of books from London and Ginnie's letters now sit in the back room of the post office beside boxes of tea and trays

of bread until Ginnie goes to fetch them, by jeep if the tide is low, by boat if the tide is high.

This morning the tide was low. A flight of oyster catchers flew low over the sand in a reversing pattern of black backs and white bellies, and Ginnie sat at the wheel of the jeep and watched them. Mr. Friendly Doctor jammed into the back seat and hung on to the safety strap as Ginnie goosed the engine and sent the jeep skidding sideways down the seaweed-coated ramp to the sand. I sat beside her and watched her, trying to figure out why this morning of all mornings she had decided to be herself. I watched her hair blowing. Thick lion hair. And I watched her nose, perfectly straight and very terrible in its own right, and made even more so by the forehead it continues from. I watched her strange combination of hands, not at all alike. The right, square, stained, clipped. The left, softer, languid, oval tipped. And suddenly I knew why Ginnie was herself this morning of all mornings. She had discovered that as herself she was most powerful. And I was the source of her discovery. I, the sacrifice. She has destroyed and now she knows her power. Finally. Finally.

And then we came to the town and drove through it to the harbor, and Ginnie parked the jeep and we got out, all three of us, and walked to the spot on which we are standing now. Myself, I don't really care about not having all the senses. Taste and touch and smell, they are all right. Useful. Instructive. And quite voluntary up to a point. Learn the feel or taste or smell of something, and if you don't like it you don't have to go back to it. And the sense of sight. I'm glad I have that. I can control it. Those two little pieces of skin. Open and shut. Besides me I've never met anybody who is willing to accord them their fantastic importance. Perhaps that's because people who can hear can't shut the world off with an eyelid.

See, like this. Shut. Now where am I? I can feel the cold wind on my face, but the wind is fairly anonymous and so is the smell of salt and fish. I can't be pinpointed with my eyes shut. I don't have to be anywhere I don't want to be. Open. And here I am, still on the quay beside the steamer which is

letting off steam. The steam turning pink, and the people on the upper deck watching the people on the lower deck, and the people on the lower deck watching us on the quay. Me and my sister Ginnie and a third person called Mr. Friendly Policeman. Or Mr. Endearing Doctor. Although if you asked him, "Are you Mr. Friendly Policeman?" he would shake his head while the wind lifted his long, thin hair. "Well, then, are you Mr. Endearing Doctor?" And he would smile with those tender, washy eyes. "Well, then, who are you?" "I am your Friend who would like to make everybody happy, even you, David. Especially you." *I can shut you out, Mr. Friendly Policeman!* It's not easy for Ginnie. She has turned her face away but you still stand by her side, and leaning slightly forward you crawl in through her ear. She would rather not have you there. Inside the sleeves of her sweater her fingers are pinching her arms, trying to keep you out. But her ears are wide open and that makes her terribly vulnerable. Ginnie, I find that I love you very much and I would like to touch your arm to tell you so. But Mr. Friendly Policeman has given the tickets to the ticket collector and the ticket collector is waiting for me, and the stevedores are waiting for me, and the people on the upper deck and the people on the lower deck are waiting for me, and it is time to walk up the gangplank. Goodbye, Ginnie. The gangplank has gone. The ropes have gone. The only thing between us is a smooth green stretch of water. I lean over the rail and watch you, standing a while and then turning and walking back to the car.

* * *

Mr. Friendly Policeman touches my elbow and invites me to go down to the first-class cabin which he reserved and Ginnie paid for. He feels that I am out of place among the tourists who lean their arms along the rail, watching Island slip away. The bleak red face of Island looks back at them, refusing to acknowledge their departure. And mine too. Which is exactly as it should be. Granite knows how to handle this sort of situation. You should take a lesson from the granite, Mr. Friendly Policeman. I can feel you at my elbow, trembling with solicitous impatience, because you don't want the other passengers to notice me, and you don't want me to notice the other pas-

sengers noticing me, and you don't want me to notice that you don't want them to notice. That's a *terrible* state to be in. They will notice me because my skin is the color of pale mud and my hands shake a lot. But I don't care. I can shut them out. Like this, see. Shut. You should use your eyelids more often, Mr. Friendly Policeman.

You know what I would really like to do? I would really like to go through that classy little gate into the section called third class, meaning the back end of the boat. I would really like to sit in the stern with the cranky mechanical capstan and the smell of tarred rope and lean over and watch the water, churning up from the screws. Pale green. The palest green I ever saw. I made up a very good game once, with two players. The sea and one other person. Green and white ribbons come twisting up from the screws, and as they break the surface you let them catch at your mind and the thought goes reeling from your head. And as the wake planes back a path of your thinking is spread upon the sea. He doesn't want to play that game. He wants me to go down into the first-class cabin which he reserved and we paid for. No, I must remember things have changed. It was Ginnie's name on the check. Virginia Oliv-flourish. All right, Mr. Endearing Doctor. Since we are going to be incarcerated it might as well be now.

The boat is rolling and Mr. Love Everybody finds it difficult to walk. Steward! Steward, this man is sick. Help him down to the cabin. No, not *me*. Mr. Friendly Doctor is the one who is sick. Can't you see? He has dandruff and his hair is falling. And look at his teeth. Little, little teeth. His teeth have shrunk. But you'll have to help me to unbutton my coat. Just to unbutton my coat, because it's hot in here and my hands are shaking. Please Steward sir, couldn't you shut off that smell of pea soup that's coming through the ventilator? Mr. Friendly is cross, Steward, because I want the upper bunk. Did you want the top bunk, Mr. Cross? Well, there are two of them. No? He wants the lower bunk, he just doesn't want me to have the upper one. Thank you, Steward, I'd forgotten how high they were, these upper bunks. How high, how narrow,

how prickly, how close to a ceiling completely devoid of right angles. Most of all I'd forgotten that.

There is almost one right angle where an air pipe crossed a sump pipe. Almost. But some idiot has wound the air pipe with insulation tape, and the effect is quite, quite ruined. I could do with my stone now, to counteract the insulation tape and the smell of pea soup. But Stone is in Mr. Never Let Anybody Get Hurt's pocket. In his hideous pinstriped pocket where it isn't appreciated at all. Mr. Long Suffering's pinstripes are horizontal on the lower bunk opposite mine. His face comes mooning out of the darkness down there.

That's where mother was lying that night we crossed the channel the other way, going back to Island after the war. That was, let me see, I was fourteen then and now I'm . . . well Ginnie was five then and now she's . . . well it must have been about fifteen years ago. My God. And I still remember Mother Marion's face in the darkness of the lower bunk. Whiter than the moon's, and wavering and wavering because she was afraid of sleep. Her dreams were not yet drained of the blood of war. Mother would spend hours walking her mind over the Island, starting with the black cliffs on the northern face. Following every bay, every funnel where the tide roars up and sucks back. From north to west, naming every beach, down to the southern coast and through the streets of town. And then she took the coast road east and went walking over the sand dunes and spindled grasses taking slow mind-strides down to the five-mile curve of white sand and shining sea. But when she lost her balance and fell into sleep her mind tricked her. The bodies of Russian prisoners grinned up at her as she walked along the pure white sand, and one by one they were taken to strengthen the pure white concrete wall the Germans were building along the curve of the bay. The air grew dark with barbed wire, and the beaches were black with mines. And as she ran into the streets of the little town the walls of the houses started to fall, scattering fire, and people were running, as the people had run through the London streets, and she awoke sweating.

Mother Marion—The sole drawback to my stone is that I acquired it after most of my friends were dead, and I find it singularly difficult to describe the perfection of the series of right angles which, due to a chemical reaction, have formed inside a piece of quartz while no one was looking. Perfect right angles. Either you feel them or you don't. I have a feeling you wouldn't because the right angle does not follow the convolutions of the human body. You were more the emotional type. I think it would have made you very happy if once, just once in your lifetime, every square inch of you had been covered with the fingertips of people who chanted in chorus, "Marion, we love you."

Sincerely,
Your son

I have maintained a long and surprisingly fruitful correspondence with Mother, starting from just after her death when I wrote to assure her that the undertaker had taken care that no one should notice that the sled which had broken her neck had also knocked out four of her front teeth. It was the sort of detail which would have bothered her a great deal. In a way it's a pity that Ginnie isn't dead too. It would be so much easier for me to communicate with her. The consolation of people dying is that I can carry them around in my vest pocket. In that form it is easy and convenient for them to be fished out, unfolded and scribbled on. Now with you, Ginnie, in your present state, I have to cope with the sheer damn active roundness of you. How do you expect to get any decent letters from me when you are always moving about and reacting to things? Putting your sandals on and taking them off, and flipping your hair out of the way with the back of your hand. And tasting things and smelling things. Wherever you are in that big, damn empty house you'll be surrounded by things and things and things. And if you're outside I have to compete with birds or the sea or whatever the hell else you're crazy about. How do you expect me to write you decent letters under those circumstances?

Stone, I wish you were not in the pinstriped pocket. I could do with you now. I could ward off the smell of pea soup by

guessing how many fractions of a second your surface would hold the impression of my sweaty finger. Stone, Ginnie never appreciated the perfection of your imprisoned right angles. Not the way I do. She would say she did, but she never spent hours just looking at you. And if she did look at you she was always popping a cigarette into her mouth, or scratching her arm. Stone, I know very well that the stripes on Mr. Horizontal's pocket must be very offensive to you. The human race loves to take a perfectly straight stripe and mold it to the human body. The worship of the divine curve. Generation upon generation of Curve Worshippers. It would be very disheartening to you, Stone, if you were not so perfectly impervious.

It's very hard for me to keep my hands still this morning. My skin is the color of pale mud, and my hands shake a lot. Pockets are no help whatsoever in a case like mine. My right hand in my right pocket is constantly reminded that Stone is not where it should be. My left hand in my left pocket twiddles with the folds of the Cross Channel Steamer timetable which I *do* insist on carrying. Every man should insist on the right to carry a timetable of his departure and arrival. Southern Railway Cross Channel Steamer: Leave Island 7:30 A.M. Arrive Southampton 4 P.M. You and I are going to spend eight and a half hours out of our lives, Mr. Friendly Horizontal, crossing the English Channel together. Breathing each other's breath, like sheep in a fold. Fifteen years ago I spent another eight and a half hours going in exactly opposite direction with Mother Marion and Ginnie. What did we call that night? The Homecoming Eve. Yes. The Homecoming Eve and we spent it sloughing across the English Channel in a mid-March gale. While Marion's face wavered and wavered in the sticky heat of five-year-old Ginnie, and fifteen-year-old I lay under the sheet on the upper bunk imagining an unswept mine concealed in the sloshing grey soup outside the porthole, bringing it closer and closer to the side of the ship until I could tease myself with the infinitesimal distance between the black spines and the riveted plates. That would have been as good a place as any to meet infinity. In the middle of the English Channel. At the bottom of a bowl of dark grey soup.

I don't suppose Father was very pleased when he met his in the Atlantic. I think he would have preferred the English Channel. Fifteen years ago and Father was newly dead, Mother was newly widowed, and I believe I was concerned by the thought that Father was lying on the bottom of the Atlantic opening his mouth for soup to come in forever. I didn't know him very well, but all the same it would have been hardly proper to leave him like that. So I wrote a letter to my friend Moger Brown, who was newly dead from being bombed while he was having tea with his aunt in Kentish Town.

Homecoming Eve
March 1946

Dear Moger:
Now that you are dead perhaps you can see my father who, as you know, was torpedoed in the Atlantic. I know that Mother still thinks of him in his navy blue uniform with the white cap and everything. I know he isn't like that anymore. What I would like you to do, if it isn't too much trouble, is to close Dad's mouth if it's open.

Yours,
David

Childish. I imagine that experience of having a bomb smacking into the teacups and smashing your glasses matured you very quickly, Moger Brown. Although you never really were childish. Or childlike. Even when you were a London Evacuee, arriving at the school for Strange Deaf Children, carrying a cardboard suitcase and a comic book. Even when you sat next to me in the dining hall and shovelled peas up with your knife, even when they knocked you down because your father was a C.O. A Cowardly Oldfart. You were never really childish at all.

And you were a beautiful writer. Such beautiful sentences and paragraphs you wrote on the distempered school walls. You recognized at once that the wall facing the three seats in the boys' lavatory was a perfect place for contemplating the question, HOW LONG MUST WE ENDURE THE AGONY OF BEING ANIMALS WHO REASON? which you, being taller than most,

were able to loop above the farthest reach of less talented scratchers with only mediocre things to say, and that since the accommodations were communal the question would be open for debate.

And I remember you pleaded sick and spent a whole painstaking afternoon scratching WHAT GOOD IS REASON IF THE PREMISE IS WRONG? inside all the lower fourth's desk lids while the rest of us were out watching a football match.

And then there was Jack and Jill written in pencil on the second-floor landing of the fire escape.

JACK AND JILL

not being able to agree on who should run the errand, decided to make everybody happy, and so they both

WENT UP THE HILL
TO FETCH A PAIL OF WATER

Then

JACK FELL DOWN
AND BROKE HIS CROWN

and so relieved himself of the responsibility of carrying the pail down the hill.

JILL

left alone, was unwilling to shoulder the burden so she

CAME TUMBLING AFTER

And one of my very favorites, Humpty Dumpty, in red crayon between the basins and the mirror in the east wing washroom.

HUMPTY DUMPTY SAT ON A WALL

Minding his own business and watching the world go by. But the world couldn't stand to see anyone so uninvolved, and all

kinds of people came to the wall to have a conversation with Humpty and to convince him of their point of view. Humpty, being a reasonable sort, listened politely to them all, until at last he lost his sense of balance.

AND HAD A GREAT FALL

And then what did the people do but call in

ALL THE KING'S HORSES
AND ALL THE KING'S MEN

Who, never having been trained for anything constructive, naturally,

COULDN'T PUT
HUMPTY DUMPTY TOGETHER AGAIN

No you were never really childish, Moger. It really is just as well that you died. You would have been terribly, terribly old by now.

* * *

Dear Ginnie:
I imagine that you are back at the Kingdom by now. I imagine that wherever you walk in the house the furniture disassembles and flies into you. I have noticed that happening lately. It should have been a warning. When you were younger it was you who used to disassemble and be absorbed into things, or more especially people. I can't exactly tell you when it started to be the other way around.

You were very powerful this morning. Powerful and beautiful. And yet this morning you produced no sound. Either you have learned to contain yourself to a fantastic degree, or else your sounds have become too ultrasonic for me to hear.

I am lying with Mr. Endearing Doctor in a first-class cabin which he reserved and you paid for. He has taken Stone from me and put it in his horizontally striped pocket. A smell of pea soup is coming in through the ventilator, and the one and only right angle in the cabin has been ruined by insulation tape. I was thinking that the last time I endured similar tor-

ments was fifteen years ago when we came back to Island from London after the war. You were there then. Five years old and hardly of any account because you were more than half absorbed by Mother Marion. You would have liked to have been absorbed by me also, except that I forbade it. You were too fragile. Too much of a responsibility. Although you almost succeeded once when I put a piece of chocolate in your mouth, and felt the inside of your mouth with my finger. Mother Marion was already carrying the death seed with her then. I saw it for the first time that night. I couldn't tell which fruit the seed was from but I could see it when she groped for her cigarettes and I could see it in the grey half light of the cabin when she stood hugging the gooseflesh on her arms. I know now what the fruit was. Me, David, I gave her part of it. David gave her a big piece of the sorrow he had brought with him from her belly. Having held the sorrow all to himself for so long in the red dark David was quite unselfish about it, and when at the age of three months a piece of it broke off and fell into the hands of a Dr. Graham, David did nothing more than lie upon his back, kicking his legs and gazing up at Dr. Graham's cloudless blue ceiling.

Dr. Graham did his best to call David's attention to what was happening. Dr. Graham clicked his tobacco-stained fingers. Dr. Graham struck various notes upon a variety of instruments. Dr. Graham communicated with David's ears by means of a shining speaking tube disguised as a torch. All to no effect. David blew bubbles and put his fingers close in front of his face. Finally Dr. Graham gave up. He held the piece of sorrow in a rather professional way for a moment or two, and then he turned and gave it to David's mother.

Marion sat down in a green baize chair, holding the gift in her lap between her stomach and her folded hands. She bent her head and examined it minutely. Oh, said Marion to her generous son, Oh, this is really very heavy . . . I'm not sure that I can accept it. But David waved her protest away with a jerk of his clenched fist. And then Marion, who had led a very sheltered girlhood, began to cry. Dr. Graham stood by the window. Someone had been fiddling with his lobster pots

lately. He fingered his beard and screwed up his eyes, trying to make out his bright yellow floats on the stretch of sun-shattered water between Island and the coast of France. (Goddam those thieving bastards. He'd like to catch them at it.) "It's no use, Marion," he said. "The boy's deaf, and that's all there is to it." He turned away from the window pressing sunlight and lobster boats from his eyeballs with the tips of his tobacco-stained fingers, taking a perverse pleasure in watching the girl crumple the silk of her dress between her hands.

"But Graham, what on earth will I say to Paul? He'll be furious. He's made arrangements for David to go to his Old School and everything. Can nothing be done?"

"Well," said Dr. Graham, "you could spend a hell of a lot of money carting the kid round to all the specialists on the Mainland. But it won't do any good. The kid's defective."

Defective. Dr. Graham thrust the word and violated Marion who had so often held herself aloof and iron bound within her pale, naked skin, beneath his hands, behind the window shades. (I wouldn't have pumped any deaf kids into you, by God.) Marion stood up, straightening her dress and her hair. "Thank you Graham." She said, "Sorry I made such a fool of myself." "Quite all right. Sorry I had to give you such bad news." He opened the surgery door for the mother and child to pass through and Marion walked out into the sunlight to shatter the proud father who was waiting in the car.

I, Paul, take thee, Marion, for my lawful wedded wife, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, honor and cherish, to have and to hold from this day forward until death do us part. To sit beside me in a shiny black Ford and tell me that my only begotten son is as deaf as a post. With my body I thee worship, even if you bear faulty children. Whom God has joined let no man put asunder, nor say that the seeds of my body were hard of hearing. It must be in your family. It certainly isn't in mine.

No Rudyard Kipling. No Old School Tie.

"Where's your son going to school, Olivier?"

"Oh. He's going to the idiot institute for deaf children." Sweet Christ, Marion. What have you done to me?

And you, Paul, lying beside me, your hand where the swelling was, wishing for a boy. And I said to you, "What do you want your son to be?" and you said, "If he's growing in your belly, what else can he be but perfect?" You admitted that my body had no fault in it. For nine months I fed an imperfect seed with my blood and my bones. For what, Paul. What have you given me?

Paul opened a window, but the unspoken reproaches did not fly away. The imperfect child, who had impeded two people's constant quest for happiness, sat on his mother's lap and tried to pick the flowers from her pretty summer dress.

You see, Ginnie, Mother Marion had never been prepared to carry anything as heavy as the gift I gave her. Her mind had never been taught the concept of heaviness, and when my gift was forced upon her it drained all her strength. Once she understood what heaviness was she hardly had enough strength left to breathe. There was just enough to take her to the night gloom of the Catholic church in the center of town. Letting the malaise slip into scented darkness, she knelt before a statue of the Madonna, whispering through her fingers to the wormy, gilded image. She came almost every afternoon. Climbing quick and furtive up the steps, fearful of being seen entering this church which was not of her faith, pausing in the entrance to tie a scarf over her bright hair, crossing herself with the tip of a finger dipped in holy water before moving fearfully into the aura of tinsel and very ancient magic. She bought a few minutes of the Virgin's time with a candle. Dropping pennies in a box, kissing the stub of wax twice. Once with her lips and once with a long taper which made the wick bloom. And a frail white prayer went smoking up to heaven. "Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee." And Marion is with thee. Kneeling and whispering beside the bank of candles, while other footsteps echo round the church and high into the vaulted ceiling.

Sometimes on Fridays she would even indulge herself in the musty confines of the confessional, entering the box like an Untouchable entering the Forbidden City. And afterwards, in the tearoom across the street, she would order black tea and melba toast to compensate for the excesses of the afternoon.

Isn't that so, Mother Marion?

Marion was a sharer. To Marion sharing was a ring, the symbol of eternity. Sharing gave her happiness and she needed to share it in order to be happy. Marion wanted to share her happiness with David. Look, David, see? Life is a happy place. Everyone must be happy, my son, otherwise how can we live? But David's world was very private and his walls were very high. He lived in a world of one where his thoughts were uncolored by the spoken word, where each sight and smell and touch broke into his consciousness like a small wave, filling his head with the gradual enormous conclusion that life is not dependent upon happiness. Oh Mary, Seat of All Life, why in the world would my little boy come to such an unhappy conclusion? It's going to kill his mother.

Well then, let me at least share with my husband. Husband, share our son with me. But David remembers being taken onto his father's knee, Marion, and being set down abruptly when he could make no sense from his father's moving lips. And then David received a pat on the behind, hopeless and disparaging, like a slap on the rump of a sad, old horse. Father didn't want a share in your defective son, Marion.

It is important to understand, Ginnie, that this is the beginning of all that happened to us later.

Mother was a sharer, Ginnie. And the death seed only made her need to share more violent. That's why she bribed the steward for a first-class cabin on the Homecoming Eve. That's why we were all together that night fifteen years ago. So that Marion could share the Homecoming. So that David could share in the dark hump which grew out of the horizon towards dawn. Marion was staring out of the porthole taking smoke

deep into her lungs and suddenly she searched for David's hand and spelled into it "Island. Look!" and when David had looked and smiled she took his hand again and spelled "Celebration." There was a bottle of Martell Three Star in the side pocket of the overnight bag. Marion snapped off the lid, took two quick swallows and handed it to David. David lifted the bottle once in the direction of the approaching land and then tilted his head back until the Adam's apple stood out from his throat, moving up and down as he swallowed. He saw his mother counting. One. Two. Three. Share. Share. And then another mouthful which he rolled around his tongue and gushed between his teeth as he handed the bottle back to his mother.

It was then, Ginnie, that I first heard the sound that Marion made. At that time I had no way of knowing how long this noise of hers had been going on because I had only just begun to hear the sounds that conditions and certain colors make, starting with the time I heard a knight screaming in his tomb when our history class was visiting a cathedral.

Mother was standing holding the Martell bottle, looking towards Island and she started to make this noise. A very high pitched, very frantic hum. As though she were trying to destroy every thought in her head. Presently we went up on deck and watched the dark grey hump grow into an island. Marion's hum grew louder when she could see the houses which Germans had lived in and roads that German boots had walked on. The hum tried to drain the blood from a hand that emerged from a faultless navy blue sleeve to tip a beer bottle in the foggy lampshine of a bar. Ten deathless fingers that had held her just above the knee in the theater darkness while bombs were dropping all around and the stage was alight with hilarious jokes about the war.

When the boat had docked and we were in John Le Mason's potato truck on the way to Kingdom House she tried to counteract the hum by thinking about discussing arrangements for her husband's memorial service with Mrs. Norbert, the vicar's wife. Ring. Ring. "Hello."

"Hello, Harriet? This is Marion Olivier. Harriet, I'd like to talk to you and the Reverend about a memorial service for Paul."

"Of course, Marion dear, of course. You know that anything Cuthbert or I can do . . . we were so shocked when we heard . . . Cuthbert has been talking to the Church Council about a war memorial for the churchyard. We thought of that nice little ivy-covered corner by the gate. In a good classic marble. Don't you think that would be rather nice?"

"Very nice." Marion thought of Sunday morning, crossing the flagstones under the tolling bell with Paul's name staring at her from a neat little column of honored dead, carved in good classic marble.

"*We* thought so, Marion."

Marion saw herself all in black placing flowers at the foot of a tall marble column. Saying to the cold smooth surface that had been defaced with name carvings, "This one is for Paul Olivier." Marion cooled the hum with imaginary marble, pressing her cheek against it as the Kingdom House came into sight, standing in the middle of the bay at the end of a causeway on an island of its own. The sea was painful to look at under the bright sky and the house at the end of the causeway remained a secret. House and rock massed together the cold, bright sun.

The hardness of imagined stone cooled Marion's forehead and subdued the hum as the truck crossed the expanse of shining water and pulled up in the shadow of the house. But then, when we climbed the front steps we saw that a plate had been screwed into the front door of the Kingdom House.

DEUTSCHE WEHRMACHT
OFFIZIERS KLUB
NUR FUR OFFIZIERS

And Marion's hum burst into terrible song. I lived with that sound for a long while. For many years I listened to it. It was not easy to track down its source, for Marion herself was un-

sure where the real beginning was. She could be certain only of the terrible moment when the sound itself was born. But of course all such things have a moment of conception, and Marion's hum was conceived after a fashion outside her whale-boned imagination, and it developed slowly, with a logic that made no sense to her illogical mind. Mother Marion was certain only that in 1944, the year the U.S.S.R. substituted "Hymn of the Soviet Union" for the "Internationale," W. Temple wrote "The Church Looks Forward," Oxford University founded a faculty of music, cinemas were showing *The White Cliffs of Dover*, Ethel Smyth, Edward Munch and our father died, she contemplated voluntary and enjoyable copulation with an enemy of her country.

Now the sequence machine is frozen in a frame showing Marion on January 22nd, while the Allies were landing at Nattuno and Anzio, stepping over the threshold into the kitchen of a farm in Devonshire to buy some eggs. If the machine had kept on running the position of arms and hands and mouths and eyes would all have gone unremarked, flowing into the next moment and forgotten. But the machine has stopped, making everything significant.

The line of Marion's thigh and knee, completing the step down into the kitchen, can be seen under the grey wool of her skirt. Her hands are still in her jacket pocket and her mouth is open. She is only saying hello, but frozen like this she looks surprised. The farmer's wife, standing at the stove with her back to the kitchen door, is turning her head quickly to look over her right shoulder and the camera has blurred her smile. In another second Marion will look at her, but that second will take us outside and beyond. In this picture Marion's eyes are turned toward a far corner of the room where a young boy in overalls is caught suspending a spoonful of soup in mid-air. In another second the soup would be in the boy's mouth, and his eyes would be downturned again to his plate, but that second would take us outside and beyond. In this picture the boy, forward leaning and openmouthed, is riveting his whole being on Marion's surprised and slowly flickering face. The sequence machine runs on, the boy takes another spoonful of

soup, the farmer's wife, putting down her cooking fork, wipes her hands on her apron and goes out with Marion to the dairy where the eggs are sorted, and the moment that was frozen into significance might be forgotten except in a small corner of a latently emotional mind, like Marion's, where significant moments are important.

It is February 26th, and for the past eight days London has been suffering the worst air raids since May 1941. Marion is walking with Ginnie along a country lane in Devonshire under a cold and very clear blue sky. Ginnie stops to look through a five-barred gate at some people who are planting a plowed field. One of them is a young boy whose hair is yellow against the deep red soil. A whistle blows and the people straighten up and rub their backs. The boy turns and presents Marion with the letters P.O.W. across his narrow back. She watches him as he walks a little behind the others to the far end of the field, a diminishing spindle among the furrows.

It is March 4th, and while the Russians begin their offensive in the Ukraine Marion's legs in navy blue slacks are pedalling a bicycle up the hill from a village in Devonshire where she has been collecting weekly subscriptions to the Red Cross. Ginnie, strapped into the carrier over the back wheel, lurches like a passenger in a galleon but is unalarmed by the motion for she has been hauled, in her creaking little wicker seat, up this same hill many times in her three-year-old life. So far on this hill in Devon it is an unremarkable day, and for Ginnie it will remain so. But Marion reaches the top of the hill and a single file of German prisoners of war on their way to dig a ditch flatten themselves against the hedgerow to let her pass and smile at Ginnie in the way of family men who are far from their children. Yet there is one among them who does not smile; perhaps he is too young to have children to remember, and this is the one who looks at Marion as she sails by upright on a black triangular leather seat leaving behind his face pale as a buttercup growing among the hawthorn.

On March 6th, the day U.S. bombers begin daylight attacks on Berlin, Ginnie spends all afternoon at the window of one

of three furnished rooms of a cottage in Devon. She is watching a tractor with a white train of seagulls plowing what once (she has been told by the lady who lives in the other side of the house), in an unimaginable time before the war, was a lawn where a boy who was killed at Tobruk used to play croquet.

March 7th. A farmer sends two of his workers, an English girl and a German boy with letters on his back, across a lane in Devon to plant potatoes in a croquet lawn. Marion, who is standing with Ginnie at the window of one of three furnished rooms, knows the girl and waves to her. The girl waves back and nods a cheerful, turbaned head in a good morning greeting. Her name is Beryl but she is dark. It is the boy who is beryl-like, yellowish, greenish yellow. Sometimes Beryl calls him Fritz and sometimes Hans, but there is no reason for Marion to wonder what his real name is for I will not suggest that this boy so nearly resembles the beryl stone that he possessed its other property in which the future becomes visible.

At half past ten Marion makes tea and, opening the casement window, calls to them both. Beryl bounces over the field on short, never-say-die legs and says "Ah, that's lovely," as she takes her mug and cradles it in swollen fingers. The boy is slower; he says, "Sank you," and walks a little way away turning colorless almost blue eyes in another direction. Beryl talks a lot between sips of tea and Marion, leaning on the sill to listen, shivers and thinks that the boy is ridiculously young to be a prisoner of war. She smiles at him as he puts his mug back on the window sill, and finds that now she cannot tell his age at all.

It is April, and while the Allies drop 81,400 tons of bombs on Germany and occupied Europe something has gone wrong with Marion's internal sequence machine. It keeps letting in shafts of buttercup yellow light. These sudden flashes, irregular in every way, come without warning and blanch all familiar and domestic colors from her mind's eye, superimposing an image, shadowy except for one shockingly distinct detail, which plunges down upon her and in that instant makes

her bite her lip. She writes to her husband Paul, who is somewhere on the North Atlantic, "I miss you," but one night she dreams that she is in a field side by side with someone else watching a dogfight between a German and two English planes, and when the German plane comes falling from the sky, screaming and all aflame, whoever is beside her throws her to the ground in the shelter of a hedge, himself on top of her and Marion awakes, cursing the inconsequence of dreams that make her sweat and shiver in the night.

On May 22nd, the day after the Allies broke through the Hitler line in Italy, a boy with a hoe came through a gap in the hedge beside a cottage where Marion was renting furnished rooms, into a field that had once been a croquet lawn to earth the potatoes that were growing there. He worked diligently and thoroughly (drawing the soil up to about six inches, finishing off the top in a careful point so as not to allow potato blight spores to be washed down to the tubers), until about a quarter past ten when Marion made tea and shouted to him through the open casement window in the kitchen to come and have a cup. He put his hoe down and marched towards the house, wiping the read earth from his colorless fingers onto his jacket. "Sank you," he said taking the cup, "Sank you. You are really most kind." Marion took a pack of cigarettes from the kitchen table and offered him one. "No. No sank you. I don't smoke," but he reached for the box of matches and lit Marion's cigarette for her. Marion took a deep, concentrated draw and when the smoke was all exhaled she could think of nothing better to say than, "Have you been here long?" "About uh, six monz. I am a pilot. I was shot down over the sous coast." This was offered in a conversational tone, but his beryl-colored eyes searched her face and Marion turned away to get an ashtray. When she came back to the window she saw that he had gulped the last of his tea and was handing her the cup. "Sank you," he said and walked back to where he had left his hoe.

On the afternoon of May 22nd, 1944, just as Marion had made tea, it began to rain. Marion opened the back door and beckoned to a tall boy who was earthing potatoes. His head moved

like pale spring flowers against the rainy sky. "Since it is raining," she said, "perhaps you would care to come in and have your tea." The boy was uncertain for one moment, and then he dipped his head and shoulders in a bow and said, "That would be very nice." He washed his hands at the sink in the kitchen. Marion laid out a clean towel for him and carried the tea tray into the living room. She looked up to see him hesitating in the doorway. "Well, come in. Come in," she said. He stood in the middle of the living room and familiar objects turned strange under the touch of the stranger's eyes. "Oh, this is nice. This is so nice," he said. When he was invited to sit he sat in a green velvet chair opposite Marion who felt secure and matriarchal behind her bone china cups and silver tea pot. Marion passed him the safe, delicate ritual of milk and sugar, and the sound of long-stemmed silver teaspoons stirred in the silence.

A tiny tea leaf which had eluded the strainer sank to the bottom of Marion's cup leaving the surface gilt-edged and bland. It was the boy who spoke first. "Tea is an unshakable habit with the English, it seems."

Marion smiled. "True. But I think it is more the idea than the drink itself."

The boy said, "I am afraid that I am not dressed to match your beautiful china."

Marion said, "Oh well, you could hardly . . . I mean, no one really observes the conventions of dress these days. But I do like to have tea properly in the afternoon. I think it's important to preserve the small civilities, don't you? To salvage sanity wherever we can?"

He said, "War isn't like that, *gnädige Frau*. War is a river of the last drop of blood that the last person in the farthest corner of a country can shed."

Marion's thumbnail went busily between the pearls strung on a single strand at her throat. She said, "What was that expression you used just now?"

"*Gnädige Frau?* It means gracious lady."

"How charming. Where did you learn your beautiful English?"

"I was a language student at Heidelberg University. But what I wanted most to do was inherit my father's riverboat that went up and down the Rhine. And we had music, and people danced all the way past the beautiful castles and beautiful forests."

"How wonderful," said Marion.

The guest in the green velvet chair became the son of the Germany of waltzes and beer gardens, his face reflecting the glory of old castles; his nostrils clean from the pure Rhine river air. Marion was safe. She poured another cup of tea, handling the teacups with graceful, motherly fingers, her back under the pale pink cashmere very straight and autocratic for her age.

"Do you mind me asking how old you are?"

"I am twenty years old. Nearly twenty-one."

"Really? You know when I first saw you I thought perhaps you were not many years older than my son."

"Ah," he said. "Is your son in the army?"

"Oh no. No. My son is only twelve years old. He is at school in Kent. Besides we are a Naval family."

"Ah. Then your husband is in the Navy?"

"Yes. Paul is in the Navy."

"Does your husband enjoy it?"

Marion raised her rather fine eyebrows. "I don't think anyone *enjoys* a war. One simply does what one is expected to do."

"Then," he said, "that leaves us all at the mercy of those who expect. *Ja?*"

Marion shivered and said, "Oh, it's getting cold. One would hardly think it was May. I think I'll light a fire."

"Oh yes, that would be so nice. Let me. I will do it." He moved his shins carefully past the tea table and knelt by the high copper fender, taking paper and sticks from a leather bucket.

"Really," said Marion, "there is no need for you to do it. Since I've been alone I have become quite used to doing things for myself."

"How long have you been alone?"

"Oh. I don't know. A long time." Her silly tongue went on prattling and would not be kept still. "It's a long time since I had a man about the place. It must be six months since Paul had his last leave."

"For a woman that is a long time. For a man it is longer."

Marion uncrossed her legs and tucked them under the chair, remembering the months following the Allied invasion of Italy when Paul had been in and out of Naples, strolling in his whites among those mystical Italian women with their Ave Marias and their spaghetti ladles. And Paul had sworn that he had never touched one of them. But when he came home he had made love with a different gusto, as though he had grown unused to her narrow, pristine bones.

The boy with a deep undernourished hollow that worked at the nape of his neck when he bent his head laid paper and crosswise sticks in the fireplace, and Marion realized that she didn't even know his name. Yellow flames licked and cracked at the cross-sticks and he stood up, dusting his hands. "I am sorry, I must wash my hands once more, and then do you think perhaps I could—" He gestured toward a piano that stood unopened in a corner of the living room. "Would it be possible for me to play a little?"

"Why yes, I should think so." She picked up the tray and followed him out into the kitchen.

In Devon on the afternoon of May 22nd, 1944, there was a very particular music box that played Chopin. If the lid was lifted you could see Marion drying two bone china teacups on a linen towel, and then walking into the living room like

an exquisitely detailed doll, obeying a mechanical system. The living room revolved and revolved around another doll. A man doll, with buttercup hair. The man doll sat at the piano and it looked for all the world as though the music in the box came from his fingers. Some trick in the mechanism made the man doll raise its head and speak.

"I hope you do not mind."

"Not at all."

"It is a beautiful piano. And it is tuned. I think perhaps you love this piano. I think perhaps you play also."

"No," said Marion. "I don't play."

She sat down by the fire and lit a cigarette while the music continued on its revolving drum, precise and toylike. The room and everything in it grew smaller and smaller, until Marion had to squint to see the fire, and the two dolls were close together and aware of every mechanical breath. Suddenly the music stopped and the man doll left the piano, and came across the shrunken drawing room, taking slow, big strides for such a tiny space.

"Why did you invite me in to tea today?"

"Because it was raining and because you looked very lonely out there in the rain."

"And because I looked not many years older than your son."

"Yes."

"How old do I look now?"

Marion squashed her cigarette on a fireplace tile. "Much too old to be alone in the house with me. I would like you to go now."

"Oh, I do not think you really want me to go. Besides it is still raining and I am still lonely. And you know something? I don't want to go because it is not often I get the chance to be close to women like you. Real women with tea sets and soft stuff for their sweaters and pianos in their drawing rooms. I

see them everywhere. I see them on my father's boat, and in the street and in the Park. I want to touch them. What chance do you think I have of touching a woman like that?"

"None," said Marion.

"You must let me touch you."

"No!" Marion stood up and tried to push past him. He let her maneuver until she had moved away from the chair and was edging past a long settee, and then he pressed her knees against the ivory brocade and she fell among the cushions.

"Please. Please. Please." He hooked a finger under the round neck of her sweater, drawing it away from her throat, nuzzling with his mouth.

"Let me." He pushed her down and down, and Marion put her fingers into the hollow at the back of his neck, and spread her legs under the thick tweed of her skirt and let him touch her.

"You are ready," whispered Fritz Bower into her neck.

"No." Marion snapped her legs together and shut off the maneuvering fingers.

"I will make you ready. Look. Look." He took her hand. "See I am ready."

Marion jerked her hand away, and the front doorbell rang. He let her get up, and slowly she went to the door, straightening her hair and her skirt.

A boy in navy blue uniform and a white helmet stood on the door step. He handed Marion a yellow envelope. Marion fumbled until the envelope was opened. She read, "THE ADMIRALTY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU . . ." while a deep erotic pain racked between her legs.

At that moment the hum began, and it never really stopped until it had engineered her neck into a precise position in front of a sled runner.

AND fifteen years ago, on that Homecoming Day in the Year of our Lord 1946, as we (Mother Marion, little five-year-old Ginnie and my fifteen year old self) stood before the Kingdom House, humming at the Deutsche Wehrmacht plaque, a girl came out of the basement door. It was Lillian Cliquot with her stomach all swollen. Her cheeks were high red and brown and thick with soft dark down. Lillian. Trim your hair with the sun's thorns, dark girl. Did I ever tell you about Lillian Cliquot, Moger? Her mother was our housekeeper a long time ago, before the war, before the Germans came to Island. When I first knew her she was still wearing her hair in long black pigtails, and she used to come to our house after school and give my bath. Just like you said the Japanese women do, only I wasn't very much of a man in those days. She would roll the sleeves of her school blouse very high on her arms so that the soft part of her arms showed, and then kneel down so that her breast pressed against the rim of the bathtub. Lillian's skin had a funny feel to it. As though there were little sweet pea tendrils of fear just under the surface. And she had a funny way of eating too. She drew the food very slowly off her fork, and sometimes her lips trembled. I remember once, my mother came into the kitchen in a long red dress, just as we were having supper, and she caught Lillian tasting a spoonful of rice pudding that had burned my mouth. My mother was furious. She came forward in her red dress and red face, and I could feel the sweet pea tendrils under Lillian's skin quivering and writhing away to beat the band, while Lillian sat still on the hard wooden chair. And it was Lillian who showed me how to sit in cupboards. She and I would go into a cupboard on the second floor, and I would sit very close to her milky smell with the door almost shut tight, and sometimes I would go up there alone, but one day my mother caught me and after that the cupboard was always locked. But it didn't matter, because soon after that I discovered the basement storage room where potatoes and apples are stored in the winter, and the smell of hopsack took the place of Lillian's smell. And Lillian grew out of the habit of sitting in cupboards and left school and cut

off her pigtails and went to work in a ladies' underwear shop and only came to the Kingdom sometimes on her half days to help her mother with the heavy cleaning.

When she came to the Kingdom House she still liked to visit my basement room, standing in the half dark fingering the little wooden carvings I had just started to do. And if I happened to touch her I could still feel the little sweet pea tendrils still there under the layers of fat that she put on her body.

Lillian had been at the Kingdom House the day we left Island to make more room for the Germans when they came over from France. Her mother kissed me on the cheek, and her tears tasted of garlic, and Lillian perched on the sea wall, sitting on her hands, knowing what she was going to get.

And now here was Lillian, after the Germans had come and gone leaving the plaque screwed on the front door and a child screwed into her belly, waddling forward, her dark hair blowing about her face. She put up her hands and held the wild strands out of her eyes, and oh her hands were full of tendrils. She smiled and David read, "Hello. *Ça va?*"

The sea turned and turned about the Kingdom House and seagulls flew low over the water. Marion said, "What are you doing here, Lillian?"

"I have been here all the time, Mrs. Olivier."

"You have been here all the time they were here?"

"Yes. I was here all the time. From the day you left. But I will go now that you are back."

Marion looked at the girl who had known the same blond flesh of the same blind race in the same private parts. She said, "Go back into the house, Lillian. We will talk about it later." And Marion walked into the hall, sniffing for the scent of strangers. David entered into the Kingdom close behind Lillian Cliquot. Lillian did not know if he had followed her as friend or foe. She decided that most likely it would be foe. The door swung shut, sealing them into the cool dark of rough

granite walls and crumbling cement. A single window high up in the seaward wall filtered the daylight through a thick muck of bird dropping and cobwebs, and the room was sharp with the smell of hopsack and a hundred years of winter stored potatoes and apples.

Lillian Cliquot, unmindful of David, passed through the storage room and heaved her heavy body up the high, uneven granite step into her living quarters, and the door was left open so that David could follow if he had a mind to.

This was David's house. Let him come and see what she was doing to this small corner of it. She did not question his right to come and smell the beds and open her cupboards and count the flies in her privy which the Germans had put in for her. Let him come. His mother would be down here soon enough to do the same things.

But David didn't come. He was sitting among the sacks and the potato barrels. This was where he had come to be. He didn't care if he never moved again. He'd move a bed down here if his mother would let him. He leaned back against the wall, watching Lillian as she passed to and fro behind her door. The sharp uneven granite in his back felt good. He mindlessly crumbled and rubbed the cement from between the granite slabs until his fingers were sore.

Lillian waited, sullen and defensive, going about her chores as though she expected no one, until curiosity drove her back into the storage room.

"What are you doing? You sleeping?"

David felt her standing over him. He opened his eyes, staring and smiling. Lillian thought that perhaps she didn't need her defiance just yet, and she let it collapse, as she settled herself on a potato barrel.

"You growed big, you." Her eyes measured the length of David against the floor. "So did you," said David pointing to her belly. Lillian laughed, slapping her thigh and stamping her sandaled foot so that her skirt moved and sent the draft from

Lillian's skin across to David. "Ah, you can talk now, can you? You can say things, you, eh?"

Nevertheless David couldn't say them very well, and the effort of being witty out loud tired him. Lillian said, "What you lying on the floor, you? You'll catch your death of cold. Come. Come in by the fire." She pulled David to his feet, catching his wrist in the grip of strong bones and cartilage hidden under the layers of fat that made her fingers look like soft brown cushions. David followed her into the room that had been his mother's laundry. The sea light came through the windows and was thrown off the white walls into the center of the room, making the room look cold. David held his fingers out to the fire that was burning under the big copper boiler where his mother and Mrs. Cliquot had boiled the sheets to make them white.

Lillian fussed and straightened the small wonders she had worked in the room. She came to the fire with a pot, turning the spigot in the copper boiler, letting out steaming water. "Running hot and cold, as they say."

David caught at the sentence through her smile, and turned miserable, feeling the same anger for her as he had felt towards the field mice that build in an oat patch, and had their nests destroyed and their bodies mangled when the oats were cut down. He gestured at the wood box, which was almost empty, and then out at the beach. Lillian shook her head. "No. No. I'll go later." But David wanted to go. He buttoned his coat, and stepped down into the storage room, turning to fasten the narrow door securely behind him, as though it might keep his mother out for a little while longer.

Lillian Cliquot had sinned before God, and during one particularly gay party, she had done it before the eyes of seven officers of the Deutsche Wehrmacht.

But it wasn't often like that. Usually they had left her alone, as long as she had kept the house well ordered, and when any of them wanted to do anything with her they had taken her decently upstairs in one of the bedrooms.

She wasn't sorry that she had stayed behind at the Kingdom House. She had thought the whole thing out carefully when she heard that the Germans were coming. She knew nothing of the Germans, except that they were the enemy and would surely kill her. If she went home to her mother's house, her mother would hide her in the cupboard under the stairs, and then the Germans would come and find her cowering like a sick animal in a clutter of seaboots and old shoes, and she would look up into their terrible faces and they would shoot her with a gun.

One night, long ago, she had gone rabbit shooting with her father, up on the cliffs. Hardly were they in among the gorse bushes than her father had signalled to her to hold the hurricane lamp high, and she had swung the lamp up as high as her arm would go, and she saw a little doe, paralyzed with light and fear, staring up at them with huge golden eyes. Her father had shouldered his gun and at the sound of the shot the doe's head had turned into a bloody pulp. Lillian reckoned that her best chance was to make herself useful. Her common sense told her that the Germans were not likely to let the big Kingdom House with its fine setting stand empty. And they might think it would be nice to have a girl to look after things for them. She would be willing to put up with other things as they happened.

So on the day that the Oliviers left to catch the boat for England, she did not lock the basement door as she was supposed to, and when the time came for mother and daughter to go, Lillian told her mother what she intended to do. Her mother's disbelief had turned into screams and curses, as she tried to drag her daughter away from the house, catching onto her hair, her arms, her dress, anything. But Lillian had wrenched herself away from her mother's frantic grip and gone running into the basement where she locked herself in. When she was sure that she had been left alone, she opened the door a crack and watched her mother, a small, stumbling figure, walking back across the causeway crying into the wind.

All that night and the next day and the day after that Lillian had worked at setting up self-contained living quarters in the

scullery where she and her mother had worked together on washdays. The place adapted itself nicely. It was a lower level than the house, built out from the rock. It had running water, and two big porcelain sinks and a place under the copper boiler for a fire. She dismantled one of the beds, and brought it down and then a chest of drawers and a table. She took a fancy to a finely carved high backed chair, and staggered down the stairs with it, but it looked strange and out of place in the little wash house, and she was suddenly afraid that the Germans would be angry with her for taking such a fine piece. So she struggled with it back to its place and brought down one of the chairs from the kitchen. The only thing she was lacking was a lavvy, but she supposed she would just have to go in the sea. On the third day the fog horn started to bellow like a sea cow, and the sirens wailed and Lillian trembling, and cramping in her stomach, washed herself all over, tied up her long dark hair, put on an apron over her dress and when the motorcycles and the jeeps came speeding across the causeway, she was waiting in the hall to open the door to everlasting damnation.

The men who stood outside were not so terrible, except that they wore severe, foreign looking uniforms and their stiff, snappy way that they had among themselves frightened her a little because it seemed that they were very angry with each other. The men who wore peaked caps and high, shiny boots seemed to be more angry than the ones who were wearing steel helmets, even though the steel helmets were the ones who were carrying guns. Suddenly Lillian realized that she couldn't understand what they were saying, and she became cramped with the fear that they would beat her if she couldn't understand them. They might beat her because she was stupid. There was a great hammering on the door, and swallowing back her vomit Lillian opened. A man in shiny boots came up the steps and said in English, "You are now under the command of the German Army. We strongly advise that you cooperate in every respect. Heil Hitler!"

Lillian said, "Won't you come in?"

"Good day," he said without looking at Lillian.

Lillian bobbed him a curtsey.

"Are you the lady of the house?"

"No, sir."

"I see. Where is the lady of the house?"

"In England, sir."

"I see. Is there anyone in the house besides you?"

"No, sir."

The gentleman turned and shouted something at the men outside. Only the steel helmets moved, running into the house, up the stairs and into the downstairs rooms.

The house, which had been emptied of the best pieces of furniture before the Oliviers left, echoed with the fearful clatter of boots on the polished wood floors. The gentleman turned to Lillian. There was down on his cheek, just like she had, only very fair. "I hope you are telling me the truth," he said.

Lillian was astonished that he might think she might have the courage to lie to him.

After a little while all the men came back.

"Good," said the gentleman. "Good," and strolled about the house as though he was the owner returned after a long absence and curious as to how his property looked. Lillian waited in the hall until he was finished.

"You are the servant here. Yes?"

"Yes."

"Where do you live?"

"Downstairs."

"Sir."

"Sir," said Lillian.

"Good. You will stay down there until you are told what to do."

And then he clicked out of the door and climbed into the front seat of the waiting car, turning as the car drove away, to talk to the other gentlemen who were sitting in the back seat.

Lillian ran downstairs, through her little scullery room and out into the salt spray air, where she had a raucous bowel movement into the sea.

Lillian sat in the little room staring out across endless miles of bitter water. In the silence her stomach gurgled. Lillian patted her unborn child. "What's the matter? You hungry, you?" She moved herself out of her chair and spread a thick slice of bread with bacon fat, shuddering at the sound of Marion moving through the house opening windows to air out the rooms. And to the child she said, "*She* will come now. Wait and see. Your grandmother Cliquot will come soon now."

Lillian, how I felt you tremble all night long in your laundry room. And the next morning when I felt *her* knock sounding through the house I imagined you downstairs staring in surprise at your heart which had jumped out of your mouth and fallen on the floor.

Your mother stood on the doorstep and beneath her black hat and black coat I saw she had taken the shape of a hawthorn tree. Ginnie, who was still in her undershirt, also felt the dark sharpness and ran and hid her soft little bottom behind Marion. But Marion ran forward smiling and got pricked.

Mrs. Cliquot said, "Marion Olivier. I have come to tell you that Lillian is in your house."

"I know she is here, Mrs. Cliquot. I saw her yesterday."

"Do not be surprised she showed herself. There is no shame in the like of her."

"Won't you come in, Mrs. Cliquot? It's cold out there on the step. Come in."

"I will come in. I will come and together we will find her and her devil spawn. She cannot hide from me, Mrs. Olivier, never fear."

"Yes. Well, do come in, Mrs. Cliquot. Ginnie, get dressed and go and play outside. David will show you the garden."

Mrs. Cliquot entered the kitchen and the coffee boiled over and the fire in the stove spat off a sharp smell.

Ginnie struggled into a pair of corduroy trousers. Mrs. Cliquot smiled. "Ah, but look at that clever girl. She gets dressed by herself. She's a lovely girl, Mrs. Olivier. Ah, but you're a fatty girl, eh? You have good fat legs."

Ginnie tugged at the back door. It opened with a shudder and Ginnie ran out after her brother. A freezing draft blew through the kitchen and Mrs. Cliquot repeated to herself, "There came a sound as of a rushing mighty wind. John, Chapter four, verse thirteen."

"Now," said Marion. "About Lillian."

"Say no more, Mrs. Olivier. I know how you must feel knowing that she has been living under this roof ever since you left. But I couldn't take her with me. I tried. Lord knows I tried. I tried to drag her to her rightful home. By the 'airs of her head I tried to drag her, but she was filled with the willful spirit of the devil. Now let the devil find her a home. That's what I say."

"Lillian is pregnant, Mrs. Cliquot."

"Huh! Don't I know it. Such filth. Such filth. Making me the grandmother of devil spawn. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping. Now, I expect she's hiding somewhere in the basement."

Marion started to clear the table.

"Mrs. Cliquot. I know how upset you must be about Lillian, but let's be sensible about it. Lillian is pregnant, and at the moment she has nowhere to go if she leaves here. Now you are her mother . . ."

"Mrs. Olivier, she has renounced her right to be called a daughter of the Lord. I am an honest woman. It is my duty to renounce her also."

Marion piled dishes in the sink. The small dark figure came and stood close behind her. "Mrs. Olivier, this woman has had intimate knowledge of the devils which killed your husband!"

The hum started in Marion's head and gooseflesh chased up her arms as she plunged her hands into the scalding dishwater. Mrs. Cliquot's dry hand caught at the roller towel and squeezed it into a thousand creases.

"No," said Marion. "No, I will not turn her out."

The dry hand jerked, convulsive with anger, and the roller towel went round with a deep rumble. "Then I *will* find her and drive her out into the light so that her shame can be seen."

Mrs. Cliquot ran across the kitchen to where narrow steps went down into the basement. "Mrs. Cliquot! Mrs. Cliquot!" Marion ran after her and caught her by the sleeve, leaving white suds on the black cloth.

The basement stairs had trembled all night in Lillian's dream as a dark, dream-terrible mother descended and descended and never quite reached out to knock on Lillian's door. When the real mother came down the steps behind Marion, Lillian was halfway under the bed reaching for a shoe. Marion knocked softly and called, "Lillian?" Lillian raised her head and hit it on an iron spring.

"Lillian?"

Lillian crawled backwards from under the bed and straightened her hair.

"Lillian? It's Mrs. Olivier."

"*And* your mother," shouted Mrs. Cliquot deliberately contradicting Marion's gentle tone. "Lillian! You come and open up this door." Marion had half expected a scuffle of fright from behind the door, but Lillian's voice, very firm, said, "It's open. Come in."

Marion pushed at the door, and Mrs. Cliquot unfolded her hands and pushed at Marion, and together they entered the room. Lillian was seating herself, smoothing her skirt down over her bottom and under her knees, and guiding her heavy body carefully into the narrow space between the arms of the chair. A suitcase was open on the bed, and Lillian's underwear had been folded large and arranged as though determined at least to cover the pattern of the paper on the bottom. Mrs. Cliquot stood in the middle of the room, her hands folded and her head turned and inquisitive. She said, "I see your fine friends went and left you."

Marion said, "How are you, Lillian?"

Lillian shifted in her chair. "They weren't my friends, Mrs. Olivier. Don't listen to everything she tells you."

"Ha!" Mrs. Cliquot cocked a look at the big belly. She leaned towards Marion and the words came out of the side of her mouth.

"Looks to *me* as though she got pretty friendly."

"*Please*, Mrs. Cliquot. We came down here for a sensible talk."

"*I* didn't come down to talk with *her*." Mrs. Cliquot said, but then she turned to Lillian. "You're a bad girl. What did your friends leave you besides shame and babies?"

Lillian said, "Shut up, Mother. I don't have to listen to you."

"Oh. Nice talk. Nice talk I must say."

Marion said, "I see you're packing, Lillian. Do you have somewhere to go?"

"I'll soon be all done, Mrs. Olivier, and then I'll go. It shouldn't take me too much longer."

"But do you have somewhere to go?"

"I'll find somewhere. Don't you worry."

"She needn't think she's coming back to *me*," said Mrs. Cliquot, and suddenly she swelled her chest with breath and began to sing.

"If thy right hand offend thee
Cut it off. Cut it off . . ."

"Well then, Lillian," said Marion above the rising hymn, "I think you shouldn't go. Until we find you somewhere definite."

Without a break in her singing Mrs. Cliquot wheeled towards the door, and her voice carried her up the stairs and across the kitchen.

"With God's Holy Fire
Burn away the sin . . ."

The singing was centered in the hallway while Mrs. Cliquot struggled with the front door catch.

"And when you hear the devil knock
Do not let him . . ."

The front door closed and the house above Lillian and Marion was silent. Marion said, "In fact you might as well stay for as long as you want. After the baby is born I'll pay you five pounds a week and room and board."

"Thank you, Mrs. Olivier. I do appreciate what you have done."

Marion nodded and smiled with a wary face, and went upstairs to find a cigarette.

A bare, thorny branch leaned over from the trellis and tapped against the kitchen window, and the shadow of the cherry tree was Chinese etched against the wall.

* * *

Thinking about Lillian for any length of time made David very tired so he closed his eyes and thought about Ginnie going back to the Kingdom House. This morning of all mornings. After the sea glare outside, the hall was very dark and

the house, empty of David, surrounded her with silence. There was silence in all the rooms. Silence in the high, square living room. The sound of Ginnie moving through it, removing her gloves, disturbed the smell of old stone and wood. And then the sound soaked into the medallions on the wallpaper and disappeared up the wide stone chimney. The condition of emptiness is silence. Ginnie stood in the kitchen doorway and saw that nothing had moved. Her cigarette lying bent and blackened in her saucer. The crumbs on the doctor's plate. David's unused knife and spoon perfectly aligned with the red squares of the tablecloth. Everything had remained in perfect stillness except for a fly walking the rim of the marmalade jar. The condition of movement is life.

Ginnie walked to the kitchen window. The wind brought down a shower of leaves from the cherry tree and battered the dark heads of the trellis rose against the glass. Ginnie began the "I am" creed.

"I am. I am me. This is me thinking this is me. I close my eyes. The thought goes back and back behind my eyelids. Back and back, down to my toes and makes them curl. I am . . ."

David had first written this down for Ginnie after Mother Marion died. Had David ever known how powerful the incantation was? I am. I am me. This is me thinking this is me . . . and when Ginnie was taken away from the Kingdom by her Aunt Amanda, David had stuffed the piece of paper into her pocket and said, "Promise me that you will learn it by heart and say it every day. Promise me, Ginnie." The words were odd and raw in David's mouth and the effect of producing them distorted his face. So Ginnie could not forget them or dishonor the promise they had extracted.

Such a powerful piece of magic David had given her. He knew it in his head but gave it to Ginnie to learn with her heart. Then the magic began. And once it had begun nothing could stop it growing.

Ginnie turned from the window and walked about the kitchen and wherever she was the silence gathered about her. She had

lived in this house with her silent brother and his silent ghosts, but she had never heard the silence before. Even the ghosts were silent, waiting to be invoked. She moved through the house, touching things that had gathered dust for years with the middle finger of her right hand.

Upstairs in a tiny room she touched the nursery rhyme people on the wallpaper who used to come alive at night and dance around her cot. But the figures were flat and unmoving under her fingers. In this room she found a seagull carved out of apple wood. Ginnie touched the seagull and invoked the ghost of her five-year-old self sitting on a potato barrel in the storage room, watching David's chisel put feathers on her seagull's tail. She put out a finger and touched the eye and the beak and the curving wing of a bird that was just about to be lifted from its wooden pedestal by an unfelt wind.

David raised his head. Not yet. Don't touch it yet. And Ginnie took her finger away and tucked her skirt under her knees against the cold that struck up from the floor. Lillian was standing there too, watching the feathers being made. Her hands on her hips and her stomach stuck far out in front of her. "Hey. You cold, you?" said Lillian. "You go in by the fire." Ginnie shook her head because she couldn't bear to be parted from her lovely seagull that was almost finished. But Lillian rubbed her arms as though the chill was catching and she went into her laundry room and rattled at the fire under the copper boiler. Presently she brought Ginnie a slice of bread, thick with jam. Ginnie took it, and folded the slice in two so that the jam squeezed out and dropped on her sweater. She ate the bread and went on watching her seagull being made. It seemed like forever. Forever she was sitting on the barrel, with the rim of it sticking into her soft little leg. And then at last David put down his chisel, and picked the sea bird up and put it into Ginnie's arms. "My seagull." Ginnie was almost afraid to smile in case in her happiness she might hold the bird too hard and break it.

Ginnie smiled in the little room with the nursery wallpaper, and then her fingers found a crack in the seagull's neck and

another on one wing and suddenly she had conjured up her Aunt Amanda. But Aunt Amanda hadn't broken the seagull. Who had broken it? It wasn't Aunt Amanda, and yet the ghost of Amanda persisted. There she was sitting in the living room of the Kingdom House. A bear skin had been flung over the sofa and Amanda was sitting on it. Marion was kneeling on the floor beside an open wicker basket, holding up little jars and cans, and making incredulously happy noises.

"Amanda! You must have used up a whole *wad* of ration books to get these. You shouldn't have. Really."

"A whole wad of *what?* Never heard of the damn things," said Amanda, which was more or less true.

"Oh look." Amanda lifted her chin and blew smoke towards Ginnie, who was peeping round the door. "This must be Ginnie."

Marion turned and held out her hand.

"Come and say hello to your Aunt Amanda, darling. Come here, darling, and say hello."

Ginnie went to her mother.

"Well," said Amanda, "what a delightful niece you turned out to be. She's awfully pretty, Marion. Does she miss her D-a-d-d-y?"

"Funny thing," said Marion. "She started c-r-y-i-n-g for him the other night. God knows why. She hardly knew him."

"Come and sit over here by your Aunty, Ginnie. Have a truffle." Ginnie sat down on the bear skin. It felt very silky under her legs. "So anyway," said Amanda, "Johnathan thought it was a spiffing idea for me to spend the war in America. I think he was jolly glad to get rid of me actually. I had reached the point where I was refusing to go to one more of those stuffy Admiralty crowd parties in London. He was never sure that I was going to turn up, which was pretty unnerving for the poor sweet. So he wangled a seat on this horrible little plane and off I went into the wild blue yonder."

"How nice," said Marion.

"Darling crowd, Marion. Absolute poppets, those Americans. You would have loved it. But as things turned out I suppose you did the right thing, staying where you could be near Paul and all that."

"I expect I did," said Marion.

"I say," said Amanda, "talking of Americans . . . there's a bottle of Scotch in my windbreaker pocket. Ginnie darling, are you big enough to get two glasses? One for mummy and one for me?"

"No. NO," said Marion. "I'll get them."

"Sit still," said Amanda, "Ginnie is a big girl now. Aren't you, Ginnie?"

"Yes," said Ginnie and slid off the bear skin.

She found two upturned glasses on the draining board, so she didn't need to call her mother, who was accepting a cigarette and listening for the crash of glass. When Ginnie got back Amanda was saying, ". . . and as soon as I got home last night I said to Johnathan, 'I simply must go over and see that sweet, wretched sister of mine.' But Johnathan wanted to l-a-y me, thank you darling, put them just here by me, and *again* this morning. And do you know what, Marion? I don't know whether it's a case of absence makes the p-r-i-c-k grow stronger, or if he simply put in loads of practice while I was away, but he's much better than he used to be."

Marion said, "Ginnie, why don't you run along and see if you can find David?"

Amanda said, "By the way, where *is* David?"

"Oh," said Marion, "I expect he's where he always is. Down among the potato barrels. You know that storage room in the basement? Well, he's taken his bed down there."

"No!" said Amanda.

"Yes," said Marion.

And they both raised their eyes to heaven and took another swallow of Scotch and water.

Amanda had made the drinks very strong, and the second swallow bit deeper than the first, and Marion cradled the glass in her hands as though it held something warm. "You know, darling," said Amanda looking round her, "this place reminds me of a messy mausoleum."

"I know," said Marion. "I know. I look at it, and then I think 'oh what the hell.' "

"And you've grown just the weeniest bit fat."

"I comfort myself," said Marion.

"Oh God yes," said Amanda. "Well, sweetie, look, you had a hell of a war."

"I can't *cope* all the time. I get sick of being so damn *disciplined.*"

"Oh God yes," said Amanda.

"When I came back here,"—Marion spat a shred of tobacco from her tongue—"when I came back I was going to be so perfectly upright, downright, forthright and all that. And then everything you set to do becomes so damn *difficult* for some reason. And you start to think 'what the hell' this and 'what the hell' that, and after a while the whole is 'what the hell.' "

Amanda said, "You know what I think the hardest thing in the world must be? I think the hardest thing must be being a serviceman's widow. Something like 'The memory is more sacred than the living presence.' "

Marion took two swallows and the afternoon ran quick with liquid sympathy.

"Right!" she said.

Amanda took her shoes off and stretched out over the bear skin.

"I miss Paul," said Marion and she began to cry.

Amanda reached over with the bottle and spilled some more Scotch into Marion's tumbler, tipping the bottle so suddenly that the liquid jumped into the glass and jumped out again. Some drops landed on Marion's fingers, and she licked them off and wiped her hand down the leg of her slacks.

"You know why I'm crying? Silly thing really. The last time I saw Paul, he had a cold, and he wouldn't kiss me goodbye in case I caught it."

"Cry, sweetie, it'll do you good." Amanda sighed enormously, balancing the whisky glass with one hand on the violent movement of her solar plexus. "I truly don't know how women can be expected to cope with a goddam war. I truly don't. Where's all your furniture?"

"Still downstairs."

"Did they damage any of it?"

"They spat grape seeds at Grandfather Olivier's portrait."

"Where did they get grapes from in the middle of a war, for God's sake?"

"I don't know." Marion took out a handkerchief and tailed her tears off into a good nose blow. "And that's another thing, I've no one to help me with anything, except Lillian and she's eight months preggers."

"Don't you have what's her name?"

"Mrs. Cliquot? No. She got righteous fever when I wouldn't run her daughter out on the street."

"What did her daughter do? Inform for the enemy?"

"Worse than that."

"*What?* That fat little kid with the moustache? Hot little bitch. She knew how to take care of herself."

"Well that's just it. She didn't."

"Well that's a fat lot of use to you, darling," said Amanda. "Sometimes I think you're too damn sweet to live."

Marion crushed her cigarette out in the bomb site of the ashtray. She was lying full-length on the floor beside the sofa, and the only object within her immediate vision was Amanda's foot. The skin was ivory colored and faintly shiny and the manicured nails looked synthetic and glamorous.

Marion said, "I'm not much of a mother. Poor little Ginnie trundles around on her own most of the time."

"What about David?"

"She thinks he's wonderful. He's carving her a seagull. She's crazy about seagulls."

"I mean what about David?"

"He's all right. The school said he is introverted. Very introverted. Which is a nice way of saying that I didn't bring him up very well. And I didn't. I didn't. But it's too late now. He's all grown up."

"He's only fourteen, darling," said Amanda, and Marion could tell from the way the ivory foot moved that Amanda was squinting down her leg and squaring up her big toe with something.

"Yes," said Marion. "But he's grown up. Sometimes he frightens me a little. You know what he did when I wrote and told him his father had been killed? He sent me a black-edged card with the words 'In Deepest Sympathy' printed on it."

Amanda's face appeared over the edge of the sofa directly above Marion. "You're kidding."

Marion giggled. "No," she said. "It's just the way my clothes hang."

"Be serious, sweetie. I mean that's a funny way for any kid to act. I always said you shouldn't have sent him to Calvin Newman. That man has some pretty funny political views."

"I told you. David isn't a kid anymore. And it wasn't Calvin Newman. I think it was some kid who was among the evacuees

they boarded at the school. And this boy's father was a C.O. you know? Always in prison."

"Oh my God," said Amanda. "Where is this kid now?"

"Dead. He was bombed, I think. David writes him letters all the time."

"What do you mean? To this dead kid?"

"Mostly in his head I think, but I found some that he wrote on paper."

"But that's creepy. For Christ's sake, Marion."

"Amanda dear, you do sound awfully like a Yank. I think it suits you, actually. Are you staying for supper or what?"

"Nope. I'm going home." Amanda sat up and plopped her feet into her shoes. "I'm going home, and I'm going to telephone everyone and I'm going to get the whole crowd back here and we'll move your furniture back upstairs."

"Tonight?"

"Of course tonight."

"Well, you just can't ask people to come and move furniture."

"Honey, you're out of the swim. These days you can get anyone to do anything if you only promise them booze."

"Well. All right. But don't bring them too early I have to feed the offspring and put Ginnie to bed. And I don't have a thing to wear."

"As the bishop said to the actress," said Amanda.

"Hey. That's funny."

"That's old."

"It's funny anyway."

Marion walked Amanda to the door, and just when Amanda was about to duck into her little red two-seater Marion thought of something and she called, "Hey. Supposing Johnathan wants to l-a-y you again?"

"Well, he'll just have to make it a quickie." And Amanda slammed the little red door and went squealing and grinding over the causeway. But Aunt Amanda hadn't broken the seagull. Who had broken the seagull? It wasn't Aunt Amanda, and yet here she was again coming up the stairs. She was wearing gold mules and tight khaki-colored trousers and a safari shirt with special pockets to hold elephant shot. The shirt was knotted instead of buttoned so that her midriff was bare and her breast jumped. Marion was in Ginnie's room, bending over the cot. The placket of her dress gaped wide open, showing an ugly expanse of flesh pink rayon underslip. She said, "Do me up for God's sake, Mandy. The damn zipper stuck."

Amanda put her cigarette between her teeth and screwed up her eyes against the smoke. She tugged at Marion's zipper and made a growling noise in her throat until it gave. Ginnie said, "Hello Aunty Amanda."

"Hello darling. Kiss me good night and go to sleep like a good girl."

Marion said, "Go to sleep now, darling. She'll never go to sleep."

Ginnie said, "See my seagull?"

"Lovely seagull," said Amanda. She kissed two fingers and patted the top of the seagull's head. "C'mon, Marion."

Someone came halfway up the stairs and a man's voice said, "The piss they give you in the pubs these days is disgusting. Nothing but blasted water. Took us ten minutes to get here and I'm damn near sober already."

"C'*mon*, Marion."

Marion kissed Ginnie and put out the light and half closed the door. The man's voice said, "Mandy, you look like a bitch."

Amanda said, "I was counting on you to steal a couple of glasses."

"I got them. I got them," said the man, and took two glasses out of his camel hair overcoat. "The R.A.F. would never let you down, ducky."

"This is Marion," said Amanda. "Marion, this is the Major."

"How do you do," said Marion.

"How do you *do*," said the Major. He had a squashed-in nose and a harelip and a thick moustache. Amanda led the way downstairs.

"Amanda," said the Major, "you look like a bitch."

In the hall Amanda embraced a small dark woman, who pecked Amanda on the cheek hastily as though she was avoiding a scene. "I *left* you only a quarter of an hour ago, Amanda." She talked through a terse, condescending little smile. Amanda made a face.

"Hoighty toighty Eulogia. Eulogia is a Spanish contessa, Marion."

The contessa held out a tiny hand to Marion, and then quickly withdrew it and tucked a stray hair out of sight under her enormous ruby-colored toque.

"And this," said Amanda, indicating a man-size bumblebee who stood behind the contessa, "is Eulogia's husband."

"How do you do," said Marion. The bumblebee blinked.

"Awfully nice place you have here," he said, and then he found a chair in the hall and sat down and went to sleep. The contessa said, "You must forgive Colin. The Germans locked him up for eighteen months. Alone. In the dark. He has momentarily lost the art of conversation."

"Of course," said Marion.

The dining room table was covered with bottles, and people were sitting on coats that other people had flung over the armchairs and sofa. Amanda's husband appeared somewhere between the bottles on the table. He kissed his wife, putting his hands very near her breasts. And then he put his wet, rosy lips

on Marion's ear. His face was covered with fine, baby pink skin which went up and over the top of his head. He smelled of perspiration. "Marion. Marion. It's been a hell of a war."

Marion said, "Hello, Johnathan."

A tall man with pale red hair touched Marion on the shoulder. "Excuse me. Somebody said you live here. Could you please tell me where to find the handle to the bloody gramophone?"

"Hello, there, *Sandy*," said Johnathan. "Sandy old boy."

The tall man shifted his pale eyes from the center of Marion's forehead to the center of Johnathan's forehead.

"Hello, Johnathan. I'm looking for the handle to the gramophone."

"Ask Amanda, old boy. She usually knows where to find those sort of things."

"Amanda? Righty-ho."

The tall man stood for a moment, shifting his eyes round to look for Amanda and then he walked away very upright and unsteady on his thin, alcoholic legs.

Marion said, "What do I have to do to get a drink?"

"Oh yes," said Johnathan. He put a damp hand in the middle of Marion's back. "Let me get you a drink."

"Scotch and water please."

"Yes," said Johnathan. "Well, I'll go easy on the water if you don't mind, Madam. This is good black market Scotch. Paid a God-awful price for it, and it goes against me principles to dilute it much." He handed Marion half a tumbler of Scotch and no water. A grinding came from the far corner of the room.

Johnathan said, "I told you Amanda would find that handle. She's awfully good at finding things like that. Gives her a chance to show off." Marion looked over to where Amanda was cranking the gramophone. She was using both hands and

her breasts were jumping. Johnathan said, "Would you say that my wife was an exhibitionist?"

"No," said Marion. "I wouldn't say that."

"Well she damn well is," said Johnathan, and he moved away carrying a heavy fold in the baby pink skin between his eyebrows. Amanda put on a Glen Miller record and started to dance with the Major. The tall man called Sandy stilted carefully across the room, and came to an uncertain standstill beside Marion. She saw that his pale eyes were riveted on the spot where one of the Major's leather jacket buttons was digging into Amanda's skin.

"Vertical expression of a horizontal desire," he said, and Marion found the remark shocking because she couldn't imagine his uninhabited body desiring anything when it was lying down, except sleep, or maybe even death. Suddenly he put his drink down and turned to her and said, "Would you care to?" And Marion found herself dancing.

He danced as though at one time he had danced quite well. His feet carried him round the floor with all the correct steps, interrupted only by the sudden, disconcerting pauses while his body leaned on Marion and fought to keep its balance. They passed close to Amanda and the Major, and Amanda winked.

Sandy said, "I'm awfully sorry about your husband. He was a very fine chap. Very fine."

"Oh, did you know him? I didn't know you knew him."

"Oh yes," said Sandy. "We were together just before he took this last beastly ship."

Sandy paused and leaned.

"On the Corvette you mean?" asked Marion.

"Yes. Very fine officer. We all thought a lot of him."

"Really," said Marion. She wondered what Paul had thought of Sandy.

"I'm really awfully sorry," said Sandy again.

"Thank you," said Marion. "I hope you don't think all this too—" she waved her hand round the room. "The real purpose of this party is to move the furniture up from the cellar."

"Of course," said Sandy. "Glad to do it. I don't think Paul would want you to be lonely in any case."

"No," said Marion.

"If there's anything I can do, just let me know. I know Paul would have done the same for me."

"I'm sure he would," said Marion.

"Perhaps you would let me take you out to dinner one evening. Cheer you up a bit. I would like to do that much for Paul," said Sandy.

"Well, we'll see," said Marion.

The record ended and Sandy swung Marion into a biased turn. As soon as he had caught his balance Marion broke away.

"Thank you," she said.

"Thank *you*."

Marion went back to her drink and Sandy followed her. Marion could feel his eyes on her back. She adjusted her shoulder straps and took a long swallow of black market Scotch without water, holding it in her mouth until her tongue burned. The gramophone started up with "Deep Purple" and Marion was angry with Sandy for bringing Paul to the party. Sandy smiled at her. A thin smile which appeared at the lower end of his bloodless face. Marion excused herself and walked away.

Amanda was being very gay with a group in a corner. They were playing a game that involved guessing the number of fingers that were going to be held out on the count of three. Marion walked over. One, two, three. Amanda shot out two fingers and found she was the odd one out. Everyone else had shot out one or three fingers. Amanda made an obscene ges-

ture with her losing number and put a shilling on the table. She turned to Marion.

"Got any shillings? I'm out."

Marion shook her head. "I need them for the electric meter."

Amanda made a face and turned back to the game. Marion said, "What about the furniture?"

"Hush," said Amanda. "Give everybody time to have a drink first. I don't want my friends to feel that I'm using them."

"Of course not," said Marion. The backs of the people in the group came up like a brick wall and she wandered away into the hall to listen for Ginnie. There was no sound. She mounted two or three steps and called, "Ginnie. Ginnie? Are you still awake?"

No sound.

Marion went back into the living room and poured herself another drink. The contessa had settled herself on a love seat among a pile of coats. Her legs were crossed at the ankles and her back very straight and she held a small red drink as though it was a teacup. When Marion came by the contessa moved a fraction of an inch to the left and smiled a small lemon-sucking smile which Marion read as an invitation to sit down. Marion sat down. The contessa said, "You dance very well."

"Thank you," said Marion.

"Anyone," said the contessa, "who can dance with Sandy is a good dancer."

"Oh I don't know," said Marion.

"Sandy,"—the contessa paused and sipped her drink—"used to be a very good dancer. Nowadays he merely maneuvers very well." The sharp spikes of mascara were lifted for a moment, and Marion caught the black eyes full in the face.

"Did Sandy tell you he knew your husband?"

"Yes," said Marion.

"Sandy is a very remarkable man," said the contessa. "He has served at one time or another with every husband of every widow who is this side of fifty. Even a little older if they are well preserved."

"Oh," said Marion.

"He's really rather good at it," said the contessa. "And I imagine it is an excellent entrée."

"That's disgusting," said Marion.

The contessa reached over and patted Marion's knee.

"You musn't think too badly of us, my dear. Wars are very unsettling. They give some people the chance of glory. But then most of those people are dead. And the rest of us take advantage of war in the same way that we take advantage of anything else. Take the Major, for example. He'll have something to talk about at parties for the rest of his life."

The Major was standing with his back to the fireplace as though he was on guard duty. His long legs touched each other all the way down, his feet pointing outward and his behind jutting sharply under the vents in his hacking jacket. He drank with his elbow at right angles and every swallow became a salute. Beside the Major's right shoe sat a young girl with exotic knees. She dragged deeply on a cigarette as the Major brought his Spitfire out of a dive with a planing of his left hand and a tortured airplane noise in the back of his throat. The Major's left hand came round again for another crack at some filthy Hun. The girl exhaled smoke and glanced upward with somnolent eyes as the Major let fly with harelip machine guns.

"Ta-tah-tah-tah-tah-tah."

Tiny beads of spit gathered on the Major's moustache and the girl applauded, shaking the puppy fat on her upper arms when the Filthy Fritz went down in flames.

"Oh Major," said the girl. Her voice was very sleepy. "Oh Major, you make me so excited."

The Major was affected very strongly. He put his glass down on the mantelpiece and said, "Excuse me. I'm going to find the bathroom."

Marion told the Major where to find it and heard his feet slip on the stairs. The contessa said, "I know for a fact that the Major never left the ground during the entire war."

And then Johnathan came and asked Marion to dance something very hot and Latin.

Ginnie was awakened by the sound of someone on the landing. She stood up in her cot with a rustle of rubber undersheeting.

"Mummy?"

No one answered.

"Mummy?"

A man put his head round the door.

"Hello," he said and switched the light on.

Ginnie saw that he was big and he had a funny mouth and a moustache.

Ginnie said, "Where's my mummy?"

"She's downstairs, sweetheart. She's busy."

"What doing?"

"She's doing all sorts of things."

"What?"

"Dancing."

"Dancing?" Ginnie had never seen her mother dancing. Ginnie said, "See my seagull?"

"I say," said the man. "That's some seagull. Can he fly?"

"No," said Ginnie. "He's only made out of wood. He couldn't fly."

"I bet he could," said the man. He came closer and he smelled funny.

"Would you like to see your seagull fly?" asked the man.

Ginnie looked doubtful.

"I bet I could make him fly," said the man. "You want me to try?"

"No," said Ginnie.

"Oh come on," said the man. "Don't be a spoilsport."

He opened the window and cold air came into the room.

"Now lean out the window. What's your name?"

"Ginnie."

"Well lean out the window, Ginnie, and I'll talk nicely to your seagull and we'll see him fly."

The man took the seagull, and the bird in his hands looked heavy and dead. She tried to get the seagull back, but the man was already leaning on the sill.

"Now watch carefully."

Ginnie watched and the man said, "Whoosh" and the bird disappeared into the darkness. The man giggled.

"Did it fly?" asked Ginnie.

"I guess it did," said the man.

"Where is it now?" asked Ginnie.

"Oh it's outside somewhere. Flying around. Having a good time. You'll find it tomorrow."

"I want it now," said Ginnie.

"Well look. You go to sleep now," said the man. "And when you wake up you'll find your seagull. All right?" He closed the window and switched out the light. "Goodnight now."

Ginnie heard him go downstairs. She stood with her nose pressed against the glass but she couldn't see anything. It took

a minute before she began to cry. She called for her mother, but her mother was dancing the samba. She didn't hear.

After a little while of crying as hard as she could Ginnie climbed out of her cot and went down the stairs, sniffling heavily and holding up the legs of her pajamas. The living room was full of strange people. They were making a lot of noise and she couldn't see her mother. Ginnie opened the front door. It was very dark outside and the stone steps were cold because she hadn't put her slippers on. The front door banged shut behind her. Ginnie began to cry again. She walked down the steps, and a flight of real birds suddenly rose in front of her, moaning and clattering their wings. The seagull was lying at the foot of the steps. Its head and one wing were broken. Ginnie picked up the three pieces and running and crying across the gravel went to David's door. She knocked but the wind carried the sound of her small fists out to sea, and David would not have heard if the fist on his door had been made of iron. But suddenly the door opened and Lillian, holding herself in her flannel nightgown against the chill of the wind, said, "Oh my God!" and gathered Ginnie and the broken pieces into the inside dark. David, feeling the commotion in his room, awoke and put on the light. The single naked bulb darkened the shadows and spread a dim pool in the middle of the room where Lillian rocked Ginnie against the clinging scent of a warm bed. Lillian kept saying, "Hush. Hush," and David came from his bed and stood over them, running his hand through his hair. Ginnie held out the broken bird. David took it and turned the pieces over and over.

"Mend it," said Ginnie. "Can you mend it?"

David read the downward droop of her mouth and nodded. Lillian went for a blanket to wrap Ginnie in, and David found the gluepot, and Ginnie's sobbing spent itself in long shuddering breaths.

Ginnie had been put into David's bed and the seagull with its drying joints lay on the pillow beside her. Lillian sat by the boiler fire, sipping tea and listening to the thump of footsteps and music. The room was dark except for the fire and David

stood by the window looking out into nothingness and tracing words on the window panes with the middle finger of his right hand. Lillian sat and listened and sipped her tea and she knew by the sudden, peculiar intakes of breath that David was crying.

"Ah, but she doesn't even know she's gone yet. What a mother, her, eh?"

Lillian put her hand on her stomach, talking to the child inside there. The child moved. There were footsteps on the stairs from the kitchen and a man giggled, very high pitched. Someone tried the laundry room door, but finding it locked went down the steps into the cellar. David stood by the window crying. Lillian put down her empty cup and went to David. She turned him gently from the window and was startled by the wash of tears on his face and neck.

"Ah, but you in a state, you. Come and have your tea."

David wiped his face with fierce hands as Lillian led him to the fire and gave him the tea that had been poured and forgotten. Lillian yawned and climbed into her rumpled bed, settling her heavy belly under her folded hands. David stood staring into the red coals. His hands went to his pockets, and then he realized he was wearing pajama trousers and his hands pulled his sweater low over his hips. Lillian could just make out the thin shape of his legs as he shifted his bare feet on the stone floor.

"Come," she said, and patted the bed beside her.

David looked up at the movement, but when he saw what she was doing he shook his head.

"Come," said Lillian. "Come. I won't bite you. It's cold on the floor."

She stroked and patted the blanket and slowly David came over and sat on the edge of the bed. Lillian saw that he was shivering. "Come," she said, and David swung himself under the blankets and lay gingerly on the edge of the bed as far from Lillian as he could. Lillian could feel how stiff his body

was and shivering. She raised her head to see if he was still crying, but he wasn't crying, only staring into the darkness with wide open eyes. Lillian reached for his hand, and David, afraid of offending her, did not pull it away. Slowly the hands became warm under the blankets and sweat started up between the palms and fingers. For a long time they lay there like that. And then David made a move to take his hand away, but Lillian caught and put it on her flannel nightdress where her breasts separated. There was a violent movement in the bed as David twisted his whole body, but Lillian held the hand where she had put it and after a moment David lay still, his breathing loud and regular. "You not sleeping, you," said Lillian. "I know the sound of your breathing when you are asleep." She moved herself over with a hefty movement until she was next to David. David moaned and Lillian could feel that he had started to cry again. She took his head in her hands and put it deep in the crease of her shoulder, stroking the back of his neck. David cried for a little while and Lillian stroked him and held him tight about the shoulders and then his body made an involuntary movement and Lillian smiled and kissed him, pulling up her flannel nightgown and pressing her body to where the movement was. David never lifted his head from her shoulder until Lillian got up to put on a clean nightgown. And when she came back to bed David was sleeping.

Someday Mother Marion's dust would cover somebody's bureau drawers. Marion would be the first because she was dust already. It was hard to imagine. She had looked very solid lying in the snow. The blood from her broken teeth had looked so alive and wet as it spilled down her chin, and a little frond of hair sticking out from her woolen cap had rapped on her forehead. "Hey, Marion. Are you dead?"

And Marion said, "To fear love is to fear life. And those who fear life are three parts dead already."

Ginnie picked up the seagull and took it into the bathroom. The German officers had thought it necessary to remove all

the locks from the inside doors of the Kingdom House. They had cut away all the ancient paint-encrusted keyholes, to which there were no keys, leaving a meticulously round hole in every door, and they had unscrewed the bolt from the door to the bathroom. Marion had covered up the bathroom hole with brown paper, but the bolt was still missing. Ginnie pushed the door with her foot and walked into the warm clouded bathroom and stood beside her mother who was stretched out in a bathful of tepid water, stopping the draft from the overflow hole with a long, water-wrinkled foot.

"Hello, darling," said Marion.

"Are you having a bath?" asked Ginnie.

She moved the seagull from her chest to her hip so that she could take a better look at her mother.

"Yes," said Marion. "Does it surprise you all that much?"

Ginnie didn't answer yes or no, but she wrinkled her forehead and sucked in her cheek, realizing that her mother was being gently sarcastic.

It must have been just after supper time, because Marion asked Ginnie if she had been a good girl and eaten all her shepherd's pie. Ginnie nodded and said, "Can I take a bath now?"

"Well, wait a minute. I'm just getting out. I'll run you some fresh water," said Marion.

"No. No," said Ginnie.

"You can't get into the bath now anyway," said Marion. "You have just had your supper and your tummy is full."

"We didn't eat much," said Ginnie, and she put the seagull on the floor and started to undress. Marion sighed, turning on the tap and testing the water with her hand. Finding that there was still hot water in the tank she let out the plug and made room for the brown, sputtering flow.

"All right. Get in."

Ginnie climbed into the bath and lowered herself into the water between her mother's legs, and then she remembered the seagull. Marion moved up to make room for the two of them.

"I don't think that water is very good for the wood," said Marion. But Ginnie was already soaping the bird all over with the washcloth.

The wood turned black and Ginnie said, "He doesn't mind. He's a water bird, don't you know?"

After a while Marion said, "All right, that's enough. Wash yourself now."

And Ginnie washed herself and then washed her mother. Washing the soap in little circular movements over Marion's cheeks and shoulders and breasts. "What are those?" asked Ginnie.

"Those are my chests," said Marion.

Ginnie squatted in the bath, holding the soap in both hands and staring at the long, brown nipples.

"Will I have chests?"

"One day you will."

Ginnie looked down at herself. The only promontory that she could see on her own front was the place where her rib cage ended, and she decided that *her* chests would probably grow there.

Ginnie said, "Tell me a story."

Marion said, "On April mornings in England the fog rolls in from the sea, and a sea cow with a gin and tobacco break in her voice awakens the sleeper along the waterfronts and beyond. And they drag themselves from the foggy reaches of their sleep and lie listening to the drip of cold little drops of water falling from the clotheslines and telegraph wires and the eaves of their houses. Sometimes the winds come gusting over the sooty daffodils in the English towns, blowing the fog away. And then sunlight suddenly surprises the skin of peo-

ple waiting at bus stops, and workmen in the dockyards and on building sites find a sheltered corner and eat lunch in their shirt sleeves. On sunny days in April typing pools dwindle into puddles, and young men with bright prospects go out to lunch and never return, because they have packed their bags and boarded a train that is headed for the sea. In the country the grass is translucent with sunlight, and the conker trees are sticky. All the world is singing. A nice month to have a birthday in, I always thought. I was born three minutes after midnight on April the second, and so by the determined grace of my mother I became an April Girl, rather than an April Fool. I was given my mother's name, Marion, and my father gave me his name, Somers, as he had given it to my mother. From April to April I grew in a small house at the mouth of a wide river. During the day the house was full of reflected sky. When the tide went out it left behind soft expanses of black mud, and hundreds of little crabs and slimy green seaweeded rocks. At night the hollow clump of rubber thigh boots passed the house, and the rattle of shouldered oars, and the muttered sniff and spittle of muttered conversations, as the men who had been working in the dockyards all day went down to take their cold wet pleasure from the black waters. And from the middle of the river a dredger made creaky music like a calliope with a broken spring. I loved to walk by the water. It was not a beautiful place, but the pebbles shifting beneath my feet along the brink of a wide and dirty river let me be alone. I was a mind walking by the water in this place of scrubby gorse and pungent mudflats.

"Mother always liked to be happy, and it was easier for her when Amanda was home from school, because Amanda always liked to have a good time. Mother didn't like me to walk by the river, particularly as I grew older. She said she was sure I was brooding. She said I never looked very happy when I came back from one of my walks by that dirty old river. She thought it would be better if I took up tennis or something at the Conservative Club, and so I did. Where we lived you could hear the riveting machines and the hammers from the dockyards all day and the hooter at seven thirty and twelve noon

and one o'clock and five fifteen. And that was very vulgar, Mother said. So we moved. Father bought a 1920-ish mock Tudor house just outside London. It had a tennis court and a sort of verandah affair at the back where you could sit and sip drinks and hear nothing but lawnmowers and the occasional swish of gravel under the tires of expensive cars. Mother was radiant. Father got a job in London and travelled back and forth on the train. He took up golf. Mother said, there Charles, wasn't he much happier now? Mother became President of the Garden Club, and had her begonias mentioned in *Homes and Gardens*. Amanda flashed around in sporty little two-seaters, and was photographed for *Country Life*. 'Marion darling,' Mother would ask me, 'you are happy aren't you?' And I would say of course I was, I was having the time of my life. I would never, never go back to that dirty dockyard town with its muddy river again. Not for anything.

"Then one day the headmistress of my school sent for me and told me that my father had just phoned and asked that I be sent home in the school car. She said she couldn't tell me why, my father wanted to tell me himself. Then she kissed me on the cheek, and being kissed by the headmistress seemed to me to be stranger than anything. I found my father in the living room by a window, staring at the lawn. When he spoke he didn't look at me, but down at the middle finger of his right hand touching the top of the sewing table in the curious way that he had, as though mapping out his thoughts on the shiny surface.

" 'Marion,' he said, 'are you a big girl?'

"It was the sort of question he asked when he was going to be funny, and I laughed and said yes, waiting to have my leg pulled. There was a long peculiar intake of breath, and when I looked I saw that he was crying. I was frightened. 'Marion,' he said. 'Your mother died.' I didn't know what I wanted to do at that moment. So I stood and fiddled with a button on my gabardine raincoat. People weren't supposed to die of flu. We had all just come home from an Easter holiday in Spain. People weren't supposed to die after a holiday in the sunshine.

"My sister Amanda came home from school. She arrived in a taxi, and when I heard the hollow chunk of the taxi door I looked out of the window. There was none of the usual fuss, with the driver getting out to help with tennis racquets or hockey sticks and duffel bags and trunks. My sister just paid the driver and the taxi drove off. She came up the steps one at time, wearing a navy blue Burberry buttoned all the way up. She looked calm and remote and capable, and I hardly recognized her.

"When Amanda came in she said, right away to my father, 'Where's Mother?' My father put his hand in the small of her back and ushered her into the room where my mother was, just as he ushered old ladies into their pew on Sundays. Something in the way she had asked the question made me wonder for a moment if she knew that Mother was dead. She was in the room for what seemed like ages and when she came out she said to Father, 'Do you have a black tie for the funeral?' Father said he didn't know, and Amanda said if he didn't she would pick one up for him when she and I went into town for our dresses. Neither of us had anything suitable to wear. So we went shopping in London for funeral clothes the next day, and Amanda managed to make even that seem almost like fun. It was lucky, she said, that we were both young enough to get away with white mourning clothes. She said that I, with my mousy coloring, would look simply dreadful in black, and she with her red hair would look like something out of the Moulin Rouge. We bought white dresses and white coats and white shoes and white hats with little veils, and Amanda said wasn't it a piece of luck that we had already got our foreign tans this year? Then we went to lunch somewhere where we wouldn't run into all kinds of people we knew and have to ruin our meal by looking sad all the time. You see, we both knew how important it was to keep on being happy.

"My mother was carried out of the house in a box with solid silver handles. When the house was empty of my mother, Father seemed to emerge, red headed and raw knuckled from the glaze she had spread over our lives. He made Amanda furious by selling the house near London and moving back to the

dockyard town, but I said I would move with him because he was lonely. And besides I was getting to the age when I would have to start competing seriously with Amanda, and I wasn't very good at that. We moved into a small house on the estuary, and when the tide went out we faced a great expanse of black mud and the house was full of the smell of it. I liked it there. Amanda only came to visit in a hurried way, to collect something or to leave something she didn't want to carry with her. Father had reverted back to the neatness of a man who had spent many years at sea, and he was very irritated if everything wasn't just in its place. He got furious with Amanda when she left her underwear and stockings drying in the bathroom. And he began to drink and when he drank he sang and swore. And none of this suited Amanda very well, so she didn't come home very often. I had a snapshot of her standing by the sea wall, holding a kitten in one hand against her breast, while the other hand brushed long fine strands of bright hair away from her face.

"Amanda brought the kitten for me all the way from London in a little blue basket with my name on the lid. But the train had made the kitten sick. 'Brought something for Marion,' she said as I ran down the steps to greet her. 'He's in an awful mess though.'

"We walked up the steps, both of us bending as we walked to peep through a crack at two points of brightness in the dark, smelly basket. We went straight into the kitchen and Amanda took the sticky little bundle out of the basket and held it over the sink while I tore a strip from an old towel and dampened it with warm water. The whole kitchen smelled awful. The kitten shivered and cried, and Amanda said she was afraid it would catch cold. When it was dry Amanda leaned down close and stroked the little head with one finger. 'Call him Entre Nous, will you?' She smiled. I said I wished she could stay with us a long time this time. So that she could find out if the kitten was going to be all right or not.

"Father wanted her to stay too. After dinner he said, 'Good to have you.'

"Amanda said, 'Thanks.'

" 'How long do you plan to stay? A week, two weeks?'

" 'I can't stay longer than tonight, Dad. I'm on my way to the . . .'

" 'For Christ's sake in bloody heaven!' shouted Father. 'You treat this house as though it were a hotel. Anybody, anywhere as long as it isn't here with us. Damn it, Amanda. I'm your father. Marion is your sister. Do you think any of your friends care about you as much as we do?'

" 'Well, that's very touching, Dad, but the plain fact is—you can choose your friends, whereas you can't choose your parents.'

"After she said that to Father I didn't feel that I could call the kitten Entre Nous. I called it Charlie instead.

"The next time Amanda came home it was to ask for the money Mother had left her. Father said, 'You know nothing can be done about that until you're married, Amanda. That's what the will said.'

" 'Then give me an advance on the money,' said Amanda.

" 'Nothing doing,' said Father. 'Suppose you marry somebody who doesn't have any money at all? It might come in useful then, you know. Your mother knew all about that.'

" 'Fine, Dad. Fine,' said Amanda.

"Within the next week or two Dad got a letter from Amanda saying that she was married, and she was sorry Dad couldn't have been there but it happened all of a sudden while Johnathan was home on leave from the Navy. She was sure he understood. Could he have the money transferred to her bank account? Then Father decided to go back to sea and I went to live with Amanda in London. Do you know the Edgar Lee Masters poem about how life is a tub?"

"Oh I know," said Ginnie. "*Griffy the Cooper.*"

The Cooper should know about tubs,
But I learned about life as well,
And you who loiter around these graves
think you know life.
You think your eye sweeps about a wide horizon.
Perhaps.
In truth you are only looking around
the interior of your tub.
You cannot lift yourself to its rim
And see the outer world of things,
And at the same time see yourself—
Taboos and rules and appearances,
Are the staves of your tub.
Break them and dispel the witchcraft
of thinking your tub is life!
And that you know life!

"Well, that's very good," said Marion as Ginnie finished the poem. "Fancy my little six-year-old being able to quote poetry like that."

"I'm not really six," said Ginnie, "I'm nearly twenty-one. You've been dead a long time, Mother."

* * *

I should think that, statistically, the chances of losing both parents in separate accidents before the age of twenty are pretty slim. The only reason Ginnie and I managed it was that Mother Marion had contemplated voluntary and enjoyable copulation with an enemy of her country, and a member of the race that had more or less intentionally killed our father and her husband. Perhaps under different circumstances Mother would also have been bothered by the tender age of the German in question—but presumably there is a limit to the number of simultaneous guilt feelings even a well brought up girl like Marion can be saddled with. As it was, Marion did very well by her conscience and killed herself. She managed this without embarrassing the family in the slightest by putting her neck in front of a briskly moving sled runner on the hill behind John Le Mason's potato field in the middle of a cold and sunny afternoon after an unusually heavy snow fall. It was very neatly done. A gay, quick tumble in the snow for all three of us on the sled. Ginnie and David and Marion.

Ginnie and David got up, all white and laughing, and Marion lay there, wool cap askew, pink cheeks to the sky and only the smallest trickle of blood on her fresh Yardley mouth. Which was strange because when they moved her head her four front teeth fell out.

All of a sudden the people on the hill were round us except for some of the children still whooping and squealing on the slide. I could see mouths calling for a doctor. Then someone felt Marion's pulse, looking at his watch while the black crows circled in the next field and Ginnie stood with her mittens dangling on ribbons from her sleeves. There was no pulse so they closed Marion's eyes and a fat man who wore a red and white scarf wound round and round his neck tried to move her and put her onto our sled, but it wasn't easy for him and by this time Marion's teeth had fallen out and she was bleeding quite hard. The man put her down and stepped back into the crowd. Ginnie's face was very white with a greenish tint. Then John Le Mason's potato truck came down the lane and stopped by the gate to the field and John let down the tail gate. A man put down an overcoat and three men lifted Marion onto it and they carried her down to the truck and laid her in the back on some sacks and potato dust. They tried to take Ginnie in another car, but she hung over the rear mudguard and was sick. I gave her my handkerchief and lifted her up onto the truck and climbed on myself. We sat on our haunches on either side of Marion's head. Ginnie was sobbing in great shaking lungfuls of air. I listened carefully to Marion and the terrible hum she had used to jam the guilt memories had stopped. I said to Marion, "Brava, Mother, brava." Ginnie sat palms upward, face upward, crying.

Here we are again, the four of us. Marion, David and Ginnie coming over the causeway in John Le Mason's potato truck. Lillian coming out of the basement door. The last time the pattern was like this was on the Homecoming Day. Only this time Lillian's son is beside her, not in her belly, her hands are white from pastry dough, and Marion is dead. The truck stops. There is an awkwardness. No one quite knows where to put Marion's body. It is taken off the truck into the house.

Three men and John standing in the hallway, holding Marion on the overcoat stretcher while it is decided where to put her. The hall table is too small. The journey upstairs is too hazardous. The sherry and cake have to go in the living room and the kitchen is too hot. Finally the trestle table in the playroom is swept clean of paper and jigsaw puzzles and Marion is put on that while women crawl around her bier picking up bits of broken crayons and the odd cups from Ginnie's plastic teaset so they will not distract those who come to concentrate on death. The overcoat is given back, and the owner folds it and gives it to his wife. His wife goes outside and rubs the bloodstains with a little snow. Ginnie is still sitting on the truck. David stands with his hands in his pockets staring at the sea. Women go in and out of the playroom with soap and bowls of water and clean sheets. Someone closes all the curtains in the house. Ginnie and David watch the anonymous hand that pulls the curtains over the windows. In the living room the undertaker is being called and a woman is looking for Amanda's telephone number. Lillian comes out of the front door and down the steps. Her hands have been washed clean. She comes to David first and after looking into his face leaves him and walks to the truck and talks to Ginnie. "Come on then," she says, "I'll make you a nice cup of hot tea, eh?" Ginnie starts to say something but an explosion of mucus and pain comes out of her face. Lillian grips Ginnie with strong fingers and half carries her indoors. David still stands outside the death-filled house. For the first time he can talk to his long dead friend Moger and his newly dead mother in the same breath. "How all of us kill the children of love, and all of us, knowing not what we do, devour their flesh," he says. "What should I do with this young girl, this young thing, this sister with whom I have been left alone?"

And with the same breath Moger and Mother Marion answer, "Show her the rim of the tub."

David turned and followed Ginnie and Lillian through the basement door into Lillian's room. Ginnie was sitting in front of the boiler fire. Lillian's five-year-old Timothy was kneeling on the floor at her feet, playing with a dump truck. Gin-

nie had taken off her wet shoes and socks and Lillian had given her one of David's sweaters to put on but she sat unmoving with the sweater in her lap, its sleeves dangling between her bare legs. She looked up as David entered and he smiled at her. Out of habit she smiled back. David would break that habit. Ginnie had spent so little time down here in this room, she felt like an intruder. She wished there was a more comforting and familiar place to sit. But the familiar parts of the house were filled with strangers and the presence of her dead mother in the playroom permeated the safest corners of the Kingdom and made the air strange and not to be trusted. "So I shall sit here in the firelit laundry room which belongs to Lillian and David. I'll sit here and watch the water boil. Watch Lillian make tea. Sip the tea. Smell the fish paste sandwiches Timothy is eating for his supper. Move back a little from the heat of the fire. Listen to the footsteps crossing and crossing the rooms upstairs. Listen to Lillian who says, 'What are we going to do?' Listen to myself saying, 'I don't know.' Listen to the house growing quiet, growing quiet. Listen to myself saying, 'Yes' when Lillian says, 'Shall we go upstairs and look?' " All this Ginnie said to herself and then she moved slowly out of her chair and the floor was cold on her bare feet as she followed Lillian up the basement stairs and into the kitchen and walking through the living room with David behind her the coconut matting made her feet itch and then they came to the front hall. The playroom door was shut. Lillian said, "I will go first," and she carefully turned the handle. The door opened. The room was dark.

Ginnie said, "No. Don't put on the light." But David snapped down the light switch and Marion's face sprang out of the darkness followed by a quick confusion of dolls and child drawing and picture books. Then, when the light had settled in all the corners of the room it could be seen that Marion was safely separated from the jumble by the wall of a black box. Then Ginnie looked again and said to herself, "Excuse me, but that is not my mother. Whoever it is looks very neat, lying in that box, but there is something unnatural about the way they have placed it in the very center of the carpet. I think they

might have tried sitting her up on the sofa with the other dolls. Anyone can see she would stay perfectly still."

David looked at his mother's face and hastily scribbled off a line:

Dear Mother,

The undertaker fixed you up fine. Not a soul could tell you knocked your front teeth out this afternoon.

Your son

Lillian said, "Poor Mrs. Olivier, eh?"

And for the time being we left all further comment on the death of my mother to her sister, our Aunt Amanda.

* * *

Amanda had heard the news late because she had not been in any of the usual places. They, Uncle Johnathan and a policeman, found her after dinner in the hotel room of a sporting goods salesman from Brighton.

"Oh, Johnathan," she said, "Mr. Bagley was demonstrating some of his equipment." Johnathan said he didn't doubt it, and she had better come along now because her sister was dead.

A short time thereafter Amanda stood in front of Marion's coffin, beating her forehead against the velvet padding of the box and scattering hairpins all over Marion's face. Uncle Johnathan leaned against the newel post in the hallway and watched his wife through the open playroom door.

"So damn theatrical. She is so damn theatrical," he said and took a swig from his silver hip flask, clowning himself with traces of Amanda's lipstick as he did so.

Amanda came out of the playroom, red hair sticking wildly from her flour paste face. She sat on the stairs, clutching at the collar of her fur jacket. "God, it's cold in here. Give me a cigarette. Where is everybody, for God's sake? Where are the kids?" Right on cue Ginnie stood in the living room doorway, her face pale and bruised looking. Johnathan said, "The whole damn family. The whole damn family."

Amanda said, "Hold this." She gave her cigarette to Johnathan and clutched Ginnie in her arms, rocking her back and forth, saying, "Baby. Poor baby. It's all right now, darling. Amanda's here."

Amanda's smell of whisky and face powder, flakes of paint hanging from the ceiling, Johnathan in the hallway holding Amanda's cigarette between his forefinger and thumb and in the small of Ginnie's back a clear picture of David and Lillian standing side by side in the middle of the living room floor, watching her accept the rocking, fur-lined embrace which was treachery, for Amanda was offering comfort against David as well as death. Ginnie held herself tight as she could. "I'm all right. Thank you," she said.

"Well, of course you are, sweetheart. Everything is going to be just fine. Mummy isn't dead, you know. She's only sleeping."

"No!" David's sudden leap upset the balance of a hinged mirror in the hall. It swung downward and the tableau disappeared. In the non-reflected instant Ginnie and Amanda were torn apart and the mirror, swinging back, faithfully reflected the movement of David dragging Ginnie across the hall, the stillness of Amanda and Johnathan and beyond them, Lillian emerging from the dim recess of the living room to stand guard before the playroom door.

David held Ginnie by her wrist and she was more frightened than she could ever remember being. She was being taken into the playroom where that strange creature was lying in its box. "Not sleeping." David pulled her in front of the open coffin and forced her hand forward until it rested on Marion's cold cheek. "Dead!" he said. Then he put the same hand on Ginnie's cheek where it burned. "Alive!" Ginnie jerked back twisting and straining until David's grip hurt her wrist, but David would not let go. With his free hand he fished under the pale blue quilting that covered Marion and drew out one dead white hand and held it up. "Dead!"

Amanda, struggling to get past Lillian, said, "He's mad. He's gone mad." Marion's white fingers touched Ginnie's balled up

fist. "Dead!" David let Marion's hand drop and the dead weight flopped over the side of the coffin. Ginnie had shut her eyes, but her mouth was wide open in a scream. David took her by the neck and thrust her open-and-shut face forward and forward until Ginnie was screaming in Marion's ear. For a long moment Ginnie stood rigid as though her bones were hardening with the smell of death. Amanda called, "Ginnie. Ginnie, come." But David had taken Ginnie against him and it was he who held her so that she would not burst with anguish.

Lillian moved away from the doorway and Amanda rushed through it and then stopped, afraid of David's eyes. "You're mad," she said. "Oh my God, you're mad. What did my poor sister do to deserve a son like you?" Her eyes dropped from David's face and she spoke to Ginnie's convulsing back. "Ginnie. Your Aunt Amanda's here, honey. Come to me. Come to me." David said, "Get out!"

"Get out? Leave that child with you? Leave you to desecrate my sister's body? Not likely!" Amanda moved forward like a busy housekeeper to tuck Marion's arm back under the quilt. David said, "Don't touch." Amanda stopped. David said, "You corrupt." Johnathan from the hall said, "I say!" "Shut up, Johnathan." Amanda turned to David. "Don't you speak to me like that!" David said, "You disease." "Now look here!" said Johnathan. Amanda said, "Shut up, Johnathan." Then to David, "You dare to tell me not to touch my own sister? You dare to tell me, you idiot, I'm not good enough? Since when did she teach you to be so pure and mighty? You're mad. You don't know what you're saying, otherwise I'd tell you a thing or two about your mother." Johnathan said, "Amanda!" "Shut up, Johnathan. Did you know, for example, that when your mother heard about your father's death, she had just had the hands of a filthy little German boy *all over her?* Did you know that when she had read the telegram she went back upstairs and *let him fuck her!*" Johnathan said, "Amanda!"

Ginnie had stopped sobbing to listen. David said, "Get out. Get out. Get out." Johnathan came into the playroom and

took Amanda by the arm. "Let's get out. Let's go." Amanda struggled, but for once Johnathan did not weaken. He hustled her into the hall and onto the front steps, holding her with one hand while he carefully shut the front door behind him.

Lillian came quietly into the room and put Marion's quilt straight. To Ginnie she said, "Time for bed, eh?" Ginnie went with her back through the living room, back through the kitchen, down the basement stairs into the laundry room. Lillian straightened Timothy's blankets, poked the fire, drew a bowl of hot water from the boiler, took a face cloth and towel from a drawer. "Wash your face," she said. "You can sleep in David's bed." Simple quiet arrangements, like a heavy door shutting off the horrible day. They went into David's basement storage room. Lillian helped Ginnie into bed, gave her two aspirins, pulled the string on the single light bulb in the center of the room, and the light went out. "Goodnight, Ginnie. Go to sleep now." Ginnie was left alone in the darkness. She heard Lillian moving in the other room. She listened to the delicate tinkle of Timothy doing wee wee in his night pot, the heavy creak as Lillian climbed into bed, and Lillian's sigh. And then the anesthetic smell of cold, damp stone slowly numbed her into sleep.

Lillian waited a long time for David to come downstairs, and as he came to bed she could tell from the abstracted way he took his clothes off and cuddled up to her that he was far away from her in some region of his own. His hands and feet were frozen. He must have been just sitting somewhere and thinking. She rubbed his hair and said, "You know, I'm not sure that that was all an accident, what happened up there tonight. I think you somehow arranged for her to say what she said, and for Ginnie to hear it. You have a strange mind. I think you hardly ever do anything without meaning to. Sometimes, if I didn't love you so much, I think I would be frightened."

David had his head on her breast, and he didn't see a word of what she said.

* * *

When Lillian awoke the next morning David's place beside her was empty and cold. Lillian crawled out of bed and put on her dressing gown, puffing against the bitter air. There was no light in the room today. The sky was covered with an old army blanket and the sea was like a slab of slate. Timothy, hearing his mother moving round the room, lifted his head from out of the blankets. Lillian smiled. "You awake, you? You stay where you are until I get a fire going. It's going to snow again today."

"Is it my birthday?"

"No. It's not your birthday." Lillian raked the ashes of the fire. "You already had your birthday this year. How many do you want? You think you can have one every time it snows?"

Timothy had been told of how, on the night he was born, an almighty snow had fallen, wrecking telephone lines, blocking roads and muffling Lillian's cries of pain as she lay in labor. On that night David had clawed and fallen through the snow to Mrs. Cliquot's cottage. Mrs. Cliquot had come to her daughter, had done what she had to do, careful and very neat. And in the morning she had gone, refusing the cup of coffee Marion offered her. A grandmother, walking back across the causeway with a face of stone.

Timothy watched his mother twisting paper and setting sticks. Her nose was red with cold, and she sniffed and wiped it with the back of her hand, leaving ash on her cheek. "Well now, there we are. There's a fire going." Lillian put Timothy's clothes on a chair in front of the fire to warm and filled the teakettle. A note from David was propped up against the electric hot plate.

DON'T MAKE BREAKFAST FOR ME. I HAVE GONE UP TO THE QUARRY. WAKE GINNIE UP AND GIVE HER THE NOTE I LEFT FOR HER ON THE TABLE. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.

Lillian stood in front of the little circle of electric heat for a moment, looking at the sea and seeing a strange triangle. Marion upstairs, white and bruised in the soft quilting of her

coffin. Ginnie, sleeping in David's harsh little room. And David, wandering through dust and machinery and blocks of granite at the quarry. Lillian found quarries fearsome. Gaping holes with black water in the bottom frightened her. When she explained this to David he had written, "Sweet Lillian, gaps can be beautiful." David especially liked the quarry that was still being worked. He liked the way monotone dust covered everything, men, machines and buildings, making them functional parts of a monumental, haphazard sculpture. And he was fascinated by the pantomime of blasting. For him there was no warning whistle and no bang. Just the ebb of men from the red flag, the long moments when nothing moved and then the changeless stone yielding to sudden, irresistible change, while the ground beneath his feet shuddered. Lillian sighed and picked up the note that was lying on the table. None of the Oliviers was what she would call normal and ordinary. Even little Ginnie there. Well, poor little thing. She had spent so much time rattling around in that big house up there, all by herself. Sometimes her mother smothered her and at other times hardly spent two minutes at a time with her, and David lived in a world of his own so it was no wonder Ginnie had some funny notions in her. Ginnie would take Timothy upstairs and the two of them would dress up, and hardly a day went by when she wasn't Queen of this or Princess that. In the summer her bedroom was full of caterpillars and grasshoppers in boxes of grass and rose petals. And there was a lizard in an enamel bowl in the bathroom. And in the winter, when there were no small animals to be captured, Lillian had seen Ginnie cut up slivers of soap into a jar of water and swirl them around and talk to them. And now the poor lamb didn't even have a mother, such as she was, eh?

"Wake up, Ginnie, wake up. David left a note for you. He says it's important." Lillian pulled the string on the light and the single, naked bulb threw a dim circle on the cement floor. Beyond the circle Ginnie moved and murmured, "What time is it?" "It's time to get up. Ah, but you'd never know it, in this room. It's too dark in here to read anything. You come in by the fire."

Ginnie rubbed her eyes with childish, nailbitten fingers, slowly remembering why her head felt heavy and why she was in David's strangely beloved room. For a moment she felt too tired to move, but then Timothy came barrelling through the door and jumped on her stomach shouting, "Bang. Bang. Bang. What are you doing in David's bed?" Ginnie said, "It's a long story. Now get off and let me get out of bed." Ginnie swung her feet onto the floor. "Ouch. It's cold. Give me my trousers, Timmy, there's a good boy." Ginnie had slept in David's sweater. It smelled pretty bad, but it was warm and came down to the middle of her thighs. Ginnie tucked it deep down into her slacks. She clearly remembered all of yesterday, and it meant nothing. She didn't feel a bit like she thought someone who had just lost her mother was supposed to feel. Lillian tossed a pair of David's wool socks on the bed. Ginnie said, "Oh good, my feet feel like dead fish. Now where's this note I'm supposed to read, then?"

"It's in here, on the table," said Lillian. "Timmy, you come and sit up and have your breakfast."

Ginnie stood with her back to the fire reading the note. It said:

Ginnie: This morning I want you to say this over and over and over to yourself until something happens. It is the "*I am*" creed.

I am
I am me.
This is me thinking this is me.
I close my eyes.
The thought goes back and back
Behind my eyelids.
Back and back, down to my toes
And makes them curl.
I am.
This is me thinking this is me.

Please do what I ask.

David.

"What does the note say that is so important, eh?" asked Lillian.

"I don't know," said Ginnie. "It's funny. I don't know what it is."

When David came back, long past the middle of the morning, he was carrying a basket and a sack. After the quarry he had gone to see Calvin Newman, and the basket held a casserole from Mrs. Newman. Lillian said wasn't that nice, and whatever did he have that was so heavy in the sack? David said nothing, and whatever was in the sack he put down very carefully in a corner of his room. Then he went out straightway to find Ginnie.

Ginnie was sitting on the rocks close to the water watching Timothy poke at a rock pool with a stick. David went up to her and looked hard into her face. Ginnie shook her head. No. Nothing had happened yet. David said, "Keep on."

Ginnie said, "What is it? What's supposed to happen? I think it's silly anyway." David looked at her again, and she said, "Oh all right. I'll keep on saying whatever it is. But I think it's silly." David nodded and went back up to the house and presently Ginnie saw him put a heavy sack into the rowboat and push off. Sculling with one hand and eating a piece of bread with the other he disappeared among the stone piers of the causeway. Ginnie turned and looked at the sea. The sky was a funny color. Yellow, as if there was sulphur in the clouds. It made the snow on the roof of the Kingdom House look an unearthly white. Lillian said it was going to snow again. I am me. This is me thinking this is me. What was David doing under the causeway? What was he doing to the piers? I am. I am me. This is . . . suddenly it was happening. It was like going under the gas in a dentist's chair. This is me thinking this is me. The thought goes back and back. This is me. This is me. And there is no escape. I shall always be me. Oh it was awful. Ginnie could see herself from outside herself and from deep inside to the outside. This is me. I am. Ginnie hung onto the rock until the feeling had stopped and then she opened her eyes. She could see half of David's boat behind a pier. She jumped up and ran down to the water and shouted. "It happened. It happened. David! Daaavid!" And

then she remembered that he could not hear, so she threw rocks into the water to attract his attention. But David's boat had disappeared again. Ginnie took a handful of stones and ran out onto the causeway, leaning over the parapet to see where David was below. She threw a shower of stones into the water and the rowboat nosed out from under the causeway and David looked up at her. Ginnie took the "I Am" creed out of her pocket and waved it. David smiled and blew her a kiss. Then Ginnie ran back to where she had left Timothy to find him paddling in the freezing water with his shoes on.

It was after lunch. Lillian was shaking out a rug in the basement doorway and watching David rowing back to the landing. She looked up and saw two cars coming over the causeway. She ran back into the laundry room.

"Ginnie. Ginnie. Quick. They're coming."

"Who is coming?"

"Amanda, and I think it's the Reverend Norbert."

Ginnie realized with a sense of shock that she had forgotten. She had forgotten that her mother was dead and upstairs waiting to be buried. Lillian said, "Oh by Cri. But what a mess we look, eh?" She smoothed down her hair. "Ah, well, it can't be helped. Come on." Lillian led the way upstairs, and out onto the front steps to meet the visitors who had come to comfort a house of mourning.

The two cars had pulled up. Amanda dressed in black was carrying a large box under her arm. Johnathan, in a dark coat and a hat was taking packages out of the Jaguar. The Reverend Cuthbert Norbert helped his wife out of their Rover. David had tied up the rowboat and Ginnie and Lillian came out the front door. They all met in the front of the house. Ginnie was folded to Mrs. Norbert's bosom and then Mrs. Norbert turned to David. "David!" She strode forward, carrying her handshake in front of her like the Union Jack. David stood his ground daring her to kiss him. But Mrs. Norbert, daughter of

missionaries and wife of a minister of the Church of England, had put the fear of God into six-foot African natives, black as the ace of spades and in full war regalia. She came on at terrible pace, and her hand grip was mighty. And then she suddenly jerked David forward and kissed him on the cheek. David pulled his face away and knocked Mrs. Norbert's hat off the back of her head where it caught and dangled on a hat pin. David wiped his cheek and Lillian took his arm and said, "Shall we go into the house?" Amanda would not even look at David. She put her arm round Ginnie's shoulders and spoke softly to her. "I've brought you a lovely black velvet dress," she said. "I hope it fits, because I was only guessing the size, you know."

Johnathan was already in the living room, unpacking the parcels, which turned out to be half a dozen bottles of sherry and four different kinds of cheeses. The Reverend Norbert said, "This is a day of great sorrow. Great sorrow. Yes indeed. Um. Where is the, ah, the dear departed?"

Johnathan said, "She's in the playroom. Would you care for some sherry, Reverend?"

"Ah. Well, perhaps after I've, ah, seen the, um. Would perhaps someone be kind enough to show me the, ah, way?"

Amanda said, "Of course. Come this way, Reverend."

Amanda and the Reverend left the room and Mrs. Norbert directed her gaze to Lillian.

"How have you been, Miss Cliquot? I imagine that you must be a great comfort to the family at a time like this. It is always a great comfort to have someone to carry on the, ah, the basic functions of the house."

David's hands began to move, speaking the language that was easiest to use for whole sentences. Lillian quieted his hands with her own. Mrs. Norbert said, "What is he saying?"

Ginnie said, "He says that Lillian is a friend, not a servant. He doesn't want you to talk to her as though she was just a servant." David nodded and took Lillian's hand and held it,

to emphasize the point. Mrs. Norbert said, "Oh my goodness. Well. No. Certainly."

Lillian said, "Excuse me. I have to go and see what my son is up to." She went out of the room. Mrs. Norbert said, "I think you children and Amanda too are being absolutely splendidly brave in the face of your adversity. I admire you, I really do." The Reverend and Amanda returned. Reverend Norbert said, "Your mother looks very peaceful, children. We can trust that she is truly at, ah, rest. That she now knows the peace that passes all understanding, and that she, um, sees God through the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins that we might be saved."

David said, "Rot!"

"I, ah, I beg your pardon?"

Amanda said to Ginnie, "Go upstairs now, dear, and put on the dress."

The Reverend Norbert said, "What did he say?"

Johnathan said, "He said, 'Rot!' "

David found a pencil and paper and wrote.

JESUS WAS EITHER A MYTH OR A DAMN GOOD MAN. BUT YOU CAN'T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS.

Reverend Norbert read what David had written and said, "But my dear boy, Jesus was God Incarnate."

David wrote.

SO WAS OSIRIS. AFTER HE WAS DEAD HIS COFFIN WAS CUT INTO FOURTEEN PIECES AND SCATTERED FAR AND WIDE. BUT ISIS, HIS SISTER WIFE, FOUND ALL THE PIECES, ALL EXCEPT THE PHALLUS, WHICH WAS DEVOURED BY THE NILE CRAB OSYRHYNCHID, AND SHE RESTORED OSIRIS TO LIFE. AND HE COULD HAVE GONE ON LIVING FOREVER AND EVER IF HE HAD WANTED TO. BUT HE CHOSE INSTEAD TO GO TO HEAVEN AND LIVE WITH THE GODS. BUT BEFORE HE ASCENDED HE AND ISIS COPULATED, AND ISIS CONCEIVED OF A SON. BUT SINCE OSIRIS HAD NO PHALLUS,

IT WAS IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. RIGHT? SO VIRGIN BIRTHS AND RESURRECTIONS ARE NOTHING NEW.

The Reverend read all this and then said, "But this is ancient myth, David." David wrote.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR STORY IS?

The Reverend gave Amanda a meaningful look. He was not yet ready to believe that David was, as Amanda had told him, mad, but the boy was certainly being very, ah, belligerent. In fact the whole atmosphere of the house was a little, um, off-putting, a little strange. Not at all the kind of thing he was used to at times of bereavement. The Reverend cleared his throat. "Yes, well, in a way that brings me to a point that your aunt and I were discussing earlier this afternoon. It, um, seems that you are all having, especially David is having some difficulty in adjusting to the, ah, tragic death of your mother. Which is, of course, quite understandable. And in view of the, ah, the, ah, circumstances she, um, we thought that it would be as well to have the funeral this afternoon. That is, of course, unless anyone has any strong objections."

David shrugged and Ginnie twiddled her fingers.

The Reverend said, "Oh, well, I *am* glad that we are in, ah, agreement because the pallbearers and the, ah, hearse will be here shortly." The Reverend emitted an audible sigh of relief. Handling other people's affairs made him very uneasy. But Amanda's account of the previous evening's events had been most hair-raising, and as his dear wife said he would never forgive himself if anything, ah, unfortunate were to happen before the burial of a deceased member of his congregation. He sat down next to his wife on the settee. Beside the push of Mrs. Norbert's grey tweed coat the Reverend's lap looked frail and insubstantial. "I, um, I think I might accept your very kind offer of a little sherry now," he said. As Amanda put the sherry down beside him she whispered, "You handled that *very* well, Reverend Norbert." Cuthbert Norbert gave her an embarrassed smile. "Oh, yes, thank you, my dear, thank you."

Mrs. Norbert said, "What was all that writing about, Cuthbert?"

"Oh, nothing, my dear, just a little theological discussion."

Mrs. Norbert said, "I see." She thought that this was hardly the time or the place for such things. She didn't approve of discussions about religion at the best of times. Religion was something that should be taught and accepted, and it was better for everybody if there was no shilly-shallying around. Mrs. Norbert was a very practical woman. It occurred to her at this juncture that neither of the children looked exactly presentable for a funeral. She said, "I think it's time you children went upstairs to dress. People will start arriving at any minute. Do you have something suitable to wear, David?" David said, "No."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Norbert. She loooked briefly to Amanda for help, and then realized that in this crisis Amanda would be no help at all. "Oh dear," she said again. "Well, I'm sure that if we looked together we could find *something*." David's hands began to move. "What is he saying, Ginnie dear?" asked Mrs. Norbert. Ginnie said, "He is saying please don't bother, because he isn't going to the funeral anyway."

There was a short pause while the Reverend breathed out and Mrs. Norbert breathed in. She said, "Are you sure that's what David said, Ginnie?" Ginnie nodded. Mrs. Norbert said, "Oh dear." Amanda had turned away and was busy setting out cheese and biscuits. Her back said that *nothing* David did could surprise *her*. David's hands moved again. Mrs. Norbert said, "What's he say, dear? What does he say?" Ginnie said, "He says the, er, he says the condition of life is death. He is not afraid of death. He does not need a death feast to ward off evil spirits and assu—what?—and salve his conscience."

Amanda pursed her lips and raised her eyes to the ceiling. Johnathan refilled his sherry glass. Mrs. Norbert said, "Cuthbert. Cuthbert, *you* speak to him." The Reverend Norbert said, "Your mother would have wanted you to come." David's hands moved. Ginnie said, "He says Mother wanted a lot of things he couldn't give her."

Amanda said, "Oh God." She turned to Ginnie. "Ginnie, I insist you go upstairs now and put on your dress. And pack your nightdress and toothbrush. You are coming home with me." Ginnie picked up the large white dress box Amanda had brought and went slowly into the hall. She heard Mrs. Norbert saying, "This isn't going to look right. This isn't going to look right at all." Then Ginnie shut the living room door behind her.

Ginnie stood alone in the hall. It was very dark for the middle of the afternoon. Only a little light came down from the landing window. A bitter draft blew under the front door, and a length of wallpaper that had come loose from the wall because of the damp lifted and fell, lifted and fell. Ginnie crossed the hall on tiptoe and stood outside the playroom door. She waited a minute and then slowly turned the handle and pushed the door a fraction of an inch. The door jumped and howled as the draft rushed through the tiny crack and Ginnie opened the door wide to stop the noise. Ginnie walked into the room and stood halfway between the door and her mother's coffin. She could just make out the white shape of Marion's face. Ginnie came closer and looked. She said to herself, "David is right. She is dead. I can't feel anything. I can't cry. I'm very bad at feeling things when I'm supposed. I can never do it. I can't even enjoy things when I have been told I should. It is only the unexpected things I discover for myself that I can really feel. I pretend most of the time. But why should I pretend when there is no one here but me? I am looking at my mother. She is dead. I feel nothing. I'm sorry. I would like to talk to you. But that would only be habit. I would only be talking to myself. You are not here anymore, and I can never talk to you again." And for an instant Ginnie realized that her mother's death was an endless thing. But then there was the sound of a car pulling up at the front of the house. Ginnie picked up her box, closed the playroom door and went upstairs, where she turned on all the lights, made a mess of her drawers looking for a clean pair of socks, splashed some of Marion's cologne under her armpits and struggled into Amanda's black velvet dress. The dress was much too long. It came

down over the tops of her knee socks, and there was a row of little pearl buttons up the back, very difficult to fasten. Ginnie fiddled with them standing at a window in her mother's room, looking out over the causeway. It had started to snow and there were two, three, four cars in front of the house now. Someone was bringing in a wreath of flowers, taking off his hat as he climbed the front steps. Ginnie couldn't fasten all the buttons; her fingers were too numb. She pushed her feet into her best black patent leather shoes and sat on the stairs.

Amanda had decanted the sherry and put on a pair of long black gloves and a black veil. She pressed the hands of visitors as they came in the door, and Johnathan showed them into the playroom. And after they had been in there a little while they passed back across the hall into the living room with solemn faces. But in secret, under dark cloth, their hearts feasted on the rituals of sorrow, bringing them very close to joy.

* * *

Dear Ginnie:

You were very powerful this morning. Powerful and beautiful. Finally, finally this morning you discovered how powerful you are. Now, before I explain to you why David made you so powerful I will explain how I was able to do it. The first thing to consider is the happy accident of my birth. I shall call it an accident, although of course in the light of all that has happened it was not so much an accident as a choice. I can see now that from the very beginning, even before I was born, I chose to be your willing victim, the sacrifice that would complete you. And so David was born deaf. And this had all sorts of fortunate aftermaths. In the first place, between the ages of the first breath and five, I was able to think without being interrupted. David's world was very private and his walls were very high. He lived in a world of one, where his thoughts were uncolored by the spoken word. Sometimes he made chinks in his walls so that his parents could get in if they wanted to. But they seemed to prefer to walk round and round, outside his walls, solemn and disturbed, as though pondering some enormous and irritating problem. So, until the

age of five, the silence was unbroken. And then, who should be the first to break the silence? None other than Calvin Newman. Now this was a real piece of luck. At the dangerous age of five, when I could so easily have become one of the happy herd, delivered tidy and pinafored to the Misses Roberts' Academy for Young People (to learn spelling and the decent, upper middle class pursuit of happiness, and the vast superiority to which they were entitled by virtue of their family names), I was delivered instead to Calvin Newman, receiver of the *Daily Worker* and the *Worker Sun*, professor of economics (before the First World War had blown out his hearing), and the only person on Island who had any hope of teaching a deaf child the alphabet. It wasn't an easy decision for Mother Marion and Father to make. There were a lot of unpleasant words to be spoken. Words like *eccentric*, *intellectual,* and *Red*. No not *Red*, darling, pink maybe, but not *Red*. But still I had the great unrevertible choice on my side and so one evening, through a mouthful of baked mackerel, Father said, to hell, I was going. And the next day David was taken by the hand into a little cottage where a blackboard and a table had been paced among the red push, overstuffed furniture in the front room. His father left him there with a little man who took David's hand and overlaid it with thick, warty fingers, bent into strange shapes, pointing to letters and pictures which he ground into the blackboard, so that his nail squeaked against the slate. And then Mrs. Newman would come running into the room holding her hands over her ears against a sound that neither David nor her husband could hear, and while she was about it she would slap crossly at the chalk dust which had settled on her furniture.

If David was slow to understand the drawings, the warty fingers would rush round the room, picking up ornaments and photographs. And if they found nothing in the front room to illustrate the point they ran into the kitchen for fruit and vegetables which they held close under David's nose until David understood.

And in this extraordinary fashion, David learned to read.

Then for reading exercises, Calvin Newman, who had no Jane and John primers in his house, produced a remarkable document called "Jubilee Chimp—her birth, food and drink. By one of her poor relations, Man." The story line was thin, it explored the comparison between monkeys in a London zoo and humans in the jungle of the London slums. But Calvin thought it might appeal to me on account of the photographs of monkeys which it contained.

Calvin Newman drew the pamphlet from a drawer in his desk. I remember the moment exactly. Calvin Newman's thick fingers and the thin unpromising booklet. I remember them crossing the room and arriving at the same moment on my desk top. I stared at what had arrived in front of me and then out of politeness picked it up and looked at it. This is what I found on first examination.

1. A lot of writing which I couldn't understand.
2. Neat columns of very uninteresting-looking symbols.
3. Four badly reproduced photographs, arranged in pairs. Human opposite monkey. Very interesting juxtaposition which should have told me something even before I had learned to read the captions.

The first pair of photographs consisted of a little girl with a torn pullover and a brown paper bag over her arm, and on the opposite page a monkey squatting beside a pile of apples and bananas and nibbling on a bunch of grapes. I later learned that under the little girl the caption read "On her way to collect garbage" and under the monkey, "Enough to get on with, thank you."

The monkey in the second combination was sitting in a very large enclosure, which turned out to be "The New Gorilla House Cost Four Thousand Pounds." The humans, seven of them, mother, father and five children, sat on the opposite page in a "Typical living-bedroom. Most of the floor space is occupied by two beds and a table." The mother wore an apron. Or rather she wore several aprons which she had somehow engineered into one garment large enough to cover her. I judged that there was enough stuff in her apron to drape the

window, cover the table and keep the occupants of both beds warm on a cold winter night. She sat beside her husband, who was in shirt sleeves and braces, and her eyes were closed. She looked as though at the moment the photo was being snapped she was not looking at the birdy, but emitting a long, private sigh.

But more important than any of this was the boy who was sitting on her lap. He had a thick round face and he wore thick round spectacles which blazed into the camera. It was to this point of light that my eye returned and returned until the image of Moger Brown (although of course I did not then know his name) and his mother was embedded in my brain. From this interesting starting point the pamphlet went on to teach me Social Science. "It happened in March, 1935, in Cambuslang near Glasgow. Robert Burns, an unemployed miner aged fifty years, found collecting refuse coal for his children, was chased by the police. He tried to escape by plunging into the river Clyde and was drowned. One morning, a year or so ago, Burns' mother went out to the coal rubbish dump and began to scrape for the coal with her hands. A few hours later she was found there, dead of a seizure. Last September his wife took to going to the rubbish dump. Every morning she scraped for coal. Under huge loads of coal she staggered to and from the dump to the house, and the four children she hoped to keep warm during winter. Then under the strain her heart failed, and she too died. In a few parts of the country the unemployed workers, through great struggle, compelled the local authorities to grant a small extra coal allowance in winter. When the National Government brought in the new Unemployment Assistance Board scales at the beginning of this year, all families that come under their control found themselves denied this extra allowance."

Biology:

"Calcium is essential for the proper building of bones and teeth. Unless there is enough calcium in the bones they break and are deformed, and unless there is enough calcium for the teeth they are not properly made. The unborn baby is very greedy about calcium, and if it cannot get enough calcium

from the mother's blood it will take it out of the mother's bones and teeth. There is an old country saying, 'for every baby a tooth,' and this is still quite a true saying."

Zoology:

"Gorillas are bound to be given a varied diet the whole year round, or else they go off their feed. For instance, if it is found that they are leaving the apples provided uneaten, the apples are replaced by some other food. The allowance of food is very generous but if their keeper notices that they are consistently eating everything up, their rations are increased. In this way the possibility of their being undernourished and in a state of malnutrition is avoided.

"A heating and ventilation plant has been placed beneath the sleeping boxes and proves a moist, steamy atmosphere of a constant temperature of about 75°F. Further heating arrangements, panel heaters in the roof of the sleeping boxes and ultraviolet light installations, make quite certain that they (the gorillas) have the full benefit of artificial sunlight. The cost of the new gorilla house was about four thousand pounds."

Math:

"Compute the weekly cost of feeding two young gorillas when the required twenty-eight pounds of grapes cost tenpence per pound, the required eighty-four bananas cost one penny each, and so on through apples, oranges, prunes, rhubarb, tomatoes, lettuce, greens, onions, carrots, Quaker Oats, tea, sugar, bread, butter, eggs, milk (condensed), milk (T.B. free, irradiated), Cod Liver Oil Cream (specially prepared every fortnight and sent down from Scotland), Idozan, Bemax, Glucose D, Germinating Wheat, and California Syrup of Figs (to aid digestion)."

Answer to problem: Weekly food bill for two young gorillas: Three pounds, fifteen shillings, and one penny three farthings.

Logic:

"What steps should be taken if, in the case of unemployment or when the income is for whatever reason reduced to

such a level as renders impossible an expenditure of five shillings per week on the minimum amount of food which is necessary to a human being in order to maintain himself or herself in health, i.e. beef, minced meat, bacon, corned beef, liver, eggs, cheese, milk, fish, butter, suet, lard, flour, bread, sugar, jam, potatoes, peas, tea, oatmeal, rice, syrup, cabbage, beans, barley, fresh fruit and green vegetables, as recommended by the Committee on Nutrition, British Medical Association, November 1933?"

Answer: Reduce quantities purchased of the first fourteen items on sheet.
(Recommended by same committee in 1933)

And yet of all this interesting information, all this food for thought which radiated from the National Unemployed Workers Movement, in White Lion Street London, the focal point turned out to be the photograph of seven people sitting in a living-bedroom, where most of the floor space was occupied by two beds and a table. Because it was from this photograph that I recognized my great friend and educator, Moger Brown. But I am getting ahead of myself. Return if you will to the picture of a small boy, somewhere between the ages of six and ten, receiving an education by kind permission of his original and irreversible choice which prevented him from becoming absorbed in a normal neutralizing childhood.

I won't say there weren't times when David wasn't tempted to want things to turn out differently. There was a little while after his father had gone to join the Navy and Mother Marion had been left alone with David. She had wanted to go with him when he walked along the shore. She would walk beside him, her hands stuck into the pockets of her slacks, standing with him to watch a cormorant dive or a sailboat make a tricky turn. David was glad that his father had gone. Sometimes he wished that his father would stay away forever so that Marion would be his friend. But it turned out to be just a passing phase. Marion started to grow heavier, because she was carrying you, Ginnie, and the weather turned cold and rainy. And then Marion wanted Amanda for her friend.

In the morning Marion left the breakfast dishes on the table and carried the coffee pot into the living room. If I followed her I would find the telephone receiver between her shoulder and her ear. Sometimes she would make signs to me to bring a cushion or a footstool, but when she took them from me her eyes were fixed inward to the place where Amanda's voice came into her ear. And in the afternoon if Amanda didn't come Marion would sit by the fire for a while with a tall glass in her hand and then go up to her bedroom and sleep. The danger was over and the war was about to advance my career. I didn't know it at the time, and I remember it mostly as an emotional experience.

The war began to wash the beaches of Island. It began with rumor, insubstantial as spindrift and blown spume. And then came the first cold waves of fear. The Germans were drawing closer to Paris. They were cutting down France. Amanda came to the Kingdom almost every day. Marion said they had better go easier on the booze and cigarettes because it looked as though the transports might be cut off. Amanda said to hell with going easy on anything. They were all going to get out before the transports were cut off. She came the next day with two hefty young men from the village and started to supervise the moving of furniture and packing of crates.

That was the last day of the Calvin Newman school for David. Calvin, who had been in the trenches during the First World War, had given David a graphic pantomine of what war was like, crawling around and under the red plush furniture of the little front room, dying the deaths of a dozen men, and making his legs heavy with the mud of Flanders, shivering with cold and staggering with fatigue, and ending with the explosion which had put an end to his hearing forever. Then towards three o'clock Calvin shook David's hand, making it known that he was looking forward to seeing David when the war was over, if it ever was, which he doubted it would be, until they were all dead. David walked back across the causeway wondering what it would be like to live in a world that was muddy and cold and full of killing without end.

When David reached home he found Marion sitting on the stairs, crying. And Amanda was standing at the head of the cellar steps with a glass of whisky in one hand and a cigarette in the other, shouting something at the men who were carrying a painting of Grandfather Olivier down into darkness.

The house looked very strange. It was more than half empty, and the walls were splotched with great unfaded patches where furniture and paintings had been. David wandered through the rooms, his footfall sounding loud and hollow. There were window-shaped blocks of sunlight on floorboards. When the wind blew the blocks were broken at the edges by the shadow of cherry leaves.

Upstairs David found Mrs. Cliquot and her daughter Lillian. They were sorting linen and towels into cardboard boxes. Lillian's fingers, flicking through a pile of sheets, reminded David of twitching rabbit ears. She was too busy to do anything more than give him a quick smile.

David went downstairs. His mother was still sitting on the third step from the bottom, making her maternity smock all wet with her tears. David paused and put out an awkward finger and touched her ear, but she didn't look up from her crying, and David skirted round her and went outside.

The day was very clear, and the coast of France lay on the horizon like a thin blue pencil. That was the place where the Germans were. The tide was coming in, filling rock pools. David pulled a limpet from a rock and fed it to a sea anemone, pulling his fingers quickly from the slight sticky pull of the anemone's tentacles, and when he looked up Aunt Amanda was standing taut and impatient in the doorway, the wind blowing partings into her hair, calling him in with quick beckoning movements of her hand. She had never learned David's finger language, and so she took David by the shoulder and guided him into the kitchen, her fingers digging his flesh.

David was put at the table, given a knife and fork, quick, quick, and a plate of salad. Aunt Amanda made a "chopchop"

motion with her hand, and then hoiked her thumb in the direction of bed. Then she picked up her nearly empty glass and left David to eat his supper alone.

David picked up his knife and fork. Aunt Amanda had given him a kitchen knife with a wooden handle and a short, shapeless blade. But the fork was silver and had his father's initials cut deep and graceful on the handle. P.D.O. Paul David Olivier.

The right hand was light and the left was heavy.

Aunt Amanda had forgotten the salad oil and vinegar. David put down his knife and fork and scraped back his chair and went into the pantry. It was cool there, and smelled of stale bread. A stream of red ants came and went through the window where the screen had curled. David followed the stream to a warped corner of the little rabbit hutch where the milk and butter and left-over potatoes were kept from the flies.

A long time ago David had gone low-water fishing with his father, walking far far out on the wet sand carrying a metal hook and a thick stick and a sack. The sun was very hot and shallow reaches of salt water were cold as they waded through, and the sea, however far they walked, never came any nearer. They hooked conger eels from holes in the weeded rocks, and Paul hit the eels on the head with the thick stick, thrashing at the water in the pools until the eels lay stunned and could be put into the sack. Nine eels, was it? Or twelve. And Marion had made conger-eel soup for supper, which was very good, but there was some left over, and it had sat and sat congealed in the pot in the little rabbit hutch until it turned bad and started to smell.

David found the olive oil and vinegar and went back into the kitchen, and as he passed the "Aga" stove he realized that it was cold and it smelled of cold ashes.

Amanda was moving all the furniture. Mother was sitting on the stairs crying. The jam on the pantry shelf glowed in the dark, and the roses outside the door bounced in the wind, and the oil came out of the bottle in a thin stream, and the seeds

of the tomatoes were yellow and green. But the stove was out. David folded lettuce onto the silver fork, feeling the stove at his back cold and dead. Finally he knew. They were leaving.

John Le Mason the potato farmer came with his truck very early the next morning. Almost before it was light. But they were ready, Marion and Amanda and David, wearing things that were hard to pack or carry. The bags were in the middle of the hall. Everybody stood around the kitchen table, their coats unbuttoned, sipping tea that Mrs. Cliquot and her daughter had brought in thermos flasks while it was still night. Mrs. Cliquot made David finish his piece of bread and jam, and the crusts stuck in his throat and made a pain. Then John's truck came and there was a frantic gathering of gloves and packets of sandwiches, and David slipped past his mother and Amanda as they moved from the lighted hall into the dark with the luggage. He went to his basement room to say goodbye.

The room was very dark. It smelled of earth and spiders and the dried grass that David had used to stuff the cracks by the window. He closed the door and went into the darkest corner, crouching on a pile of folded sacks. With his eyes shut he thought of the cold, dead stove in the kitchen trying to tap the flood of tearful and certain knowledge that had come to him yesterday as he ate his supper. "I'm trying to say goodbye. I won't be here tomorrow."

He filled his mind with the thought, but before it could take root his Aunt Amanda was big and dark in the doorway. He could feel her eyes searching for him, but he didn't move, and at last she went away. David stayed still. Suppose he didn't move? Suppose they didn't find him, and he stayed here, quite still until the Germans came? He thought of the potato truck trundling down the causeway with Marion and Amanda still peering into the darkness for a glimpse of him.

Suddenly he was filled with panic. He jumped, catching his foot on something and nearly fell headlong out the door. He wanted to ride in the cab with John, but Amanda came for-

ward with an angry face and heaved him onto the tail gate, signalling him to help his mother up.

Marion wasn't crying this morning. She let out girlish little shrieks as John Le Mason put his hands on her behind to help her onto the truck. Marion settled herself on a suitcase and Amanda said, "It's all right, John, I can manage. You don't have to goose me."

Mrs. Cliquot wanted to know from the ground why Marion didn't ride beside John and Marion said that she couldn't stand the smell of John's foul little cigarettes. The wind blew the words away from the tongue before they touched the great, solemn silence of the morning.

David sat with his back to the cab. He could see John's hat and nose and chin through the little barred window. John lit one of his black tobacco cigarettes, flicked the match out of the cab window and started the motor.

Everything started to tremble. The leather suitcases, the folded nightdresses and sweaters, and shirts and tins of talcum powder and flesh and bone. The goodbyes trembled into nothingness and the truck started down the causeway, causing Mrs. Cliquot and her daughter Lillian to grow smaller and smaller at the foot of the Kingdom. Mrs. Cliquot was weeping, with her apron to her eyes, and Lillian sat on her hands on the sea wall, her dark hair blowing in the wind.

The truck sped across the causeway and then climbed past the coastguard's house, groaning up the short steep hill which had been carved close against a wall of quarry rock. On one side the rock rose red and dark, and on the other sand dunes and the long white curve of the bay fell away into the half light of the very early morning. Long brown ribbons of "vraik," harvested at low tide like sea grass, had been piled into heaps to dry in the hollow of the sand hills. The rotten salty smell followed the truck long after it had breasted the hill and turned inland to the half-dug potato fields and tall, unlighted farms.

Amanda had taken off her scarf and was holding it into the wind like a ribbon. Marion's lips and Amanda's lips were moving together. They were singing like Sunday School children on a picnic. David let his head rattle against the metal of the cab. He bunched his hands deep in his pockets and pressed them over the hollow feeling in his stomach.

There was only one boat in the harbor. The oil tankers and cargo boats had stopped coming. The channel steamer was tied in solitary state against the quay, giving off a tirade of steam and bilge water. The sun was just beginning to color the tip of her foremast, and the gulls clattered around a circle of galley slops that widened in the dark green water. Cars were parked all askew among the piles of tomato boxes that the farmers had unloaded as near to the crane as possible in the frantic hope that they might be taken on board.

John got as near to the customs sheds as he could, and came round and helped David to jump off the truck, ignoring the man who came running from the sheds, waving an arm with OFFICIAL stamped in red on an arm band. Amanda stood up on the back of the truck and shouted something, and the man turned back to the sheds. Marion was helped to the ground, then Amanda, who gave David an armload of small packages to hold while she went striding off in the direction of the sheds, slapping a paper-clip full of tickets against her thigh.

David wandered to the edge of the quay and stood looking down into the dark abyss between the ship's side and the quay wall. He wondered what it would be like to be crushed to death by the thick rubber bumper down there among the hanging mussels and seaweed. He remembered Calvin Newman's pantomime of dying in the Flanders mud. The faces clustered at the ship's rail above him were staring down into the abyss, too.

David turned and saw his mother standing a little way off, exactly in the middle of two piles of tomato boxes. A tall woman who bulged sharp and fantastic under her tweed coat. Her hair was tied in a blue paisley scarf, tight under her chin, and the few strands of hair that escaped looked greasy and drab. She was looking for him with uncertain movements of her

head and body. He went to her, wanting to hurry. The packages bounced against his chest as he ran. But when he reached his mother she had spied somebody already on the boat, and was waving and smiling. She put out an abstracted hand in David's direction, catching him at the back of the neck and propelling him towards the sheds.

It may be seen from the quality of that memory that at the age of nine I suffered from fairly commonplace emotions. Looking back I wonder that the white disk of silence, which I wore like a talisman, didn't give up and get itself lost or stolen. But I must have shown some promise because my deafness didn't leave me. In fact it got itself guaranteed for life (my life, that is) by a kindly old doctor who said, as he wrote out the medical certificate in surprisingly legible handwriting, that he hoped some day to forgive himself for being too old to go and bandage the amazing number of cuts and bruises that were being sustained in France just then. I could see from the number of unnecessary inkspots and pen jabs that he fitted into his signature that he meant it, and I am afraid that I shook his hand with an emotion which embarrassed both of us. Which again shows all too plainly that at the age of nine, had it not been for my talisman, I would probably have been commonplace enough to want to be a soldier. But as I said, luck was with me, and the little piece of paper which bore its name as well as the self-accusing name of the doctor, was my entrée to the London School for Deaf Children that Marion assured me would be a big improvement over Calvin Newman. I was taken to buy a grey worsted suit and a pale pink school tie, and three-quarter length grey wool socks that itched where the elastic garter tightened them just above the calf. And then Marion, who was still heavy from being pregnant with you, Ginnie, so that her good tweed suit pulled just a little tight across her breasts, drove me down to the London School, which was not in London but outside it.

A fact which gave rise to some crass nine-year-old jokes about misnomers told by David to the pair of cold, blue-looking knees which stuck out of his short grey pants. (Of course afterwards I realized that if the London School for Deaf Children

had really been in the middle of London, Moger Brown would hardly have been sent there to avoid unhealthful contact with the bombs which were delivered by the ton, with German punctuality, at seven on the dot every evening.) And so I met Moger, who encouraged me to overcome my nine-year-old self in preparation for my life's work. Which was you, Ginnie.

* * *

Moger Brown came to the London School for Deaf Children in the middle of a term in a bus full of evacuee children. The deaf children pressed against the windows to watch the bus unload. First the girls. A lot of mothers had sacrificed their wide-shouldered coats, cut them down to more or less fit their thin, food-rationed daughters; and the mothers had bought plastic hair slides in the shape of bows of ribbon, or scottie dogs, to catch up their daughters' badly cut hair. They wanted their daughters to look nice for us, you see. The daughters formed a docile crocodile on the gravel drive and then the sons came out of the bus looking very fierce. Any tears they had shed had long since been soaked up by their pullover sleeves. The London children entered the school in a long line two by two, carrying cardboard cases and comic books. The line halted in the hall. The sons and daughters stood close together, whispering among themselves and staring boldly into the passing faces. Some of them stuck out their tongues at the deaf children and some of them laughed behind their hands.

It still hurt David to be laughed at so he didn't look. He didn't look and yet he did look, he must have looked, for how else would he have seen the boy who didn't have a partner; the boy at the end of the line who had already been singled out to stand by himself; the pale boy who wore round, thick spectacles on a round, thick face; who was clearly as anything the same boy who, in the bosom of his family, had stared out of the photograph from a room that was only half as large as the room which had been enjoyed by Bo Bo the chimp. Moger, Moger. There you were real as life standing at the end of the line, and David recognized you, but how was David going to get to speak to you? You never spoke to anybody.

David knew that the boy could speak and hear because he never came to any of the deaf children's classes. But the boy never spoke, even to the London children, and they never spoke to him. For weeks I sat opposite you in the refectory, Moger Brown. Breakfast, lunch and supper I sent you messages over the salt and pepper pots and plates of bread and margarine. I recognize you, I said, I recognize you. Sometimes your eyes behind the thick spectacles washed over David like a pale green sea, but most of the time you sat with your pale thick face close to the food looking neither right nor left. You didn't want to be recognized by a stranger.

Then one day David rounded a red brick corner and came across a huddled group of London children pounding something that squirmed on the gravel. Then the huddle broke and David saw a boy sitting on the gravel walk with a bloody nose. The eyes were smaller without spectacles, and their green was red with painful tears. "Where's me glasses? I can't see without me glasses." The children laughed and jumped up and down as Moger crawled on the gravel, hunting with his hands. "Nazi, Nazi," they shouted. "Your father is a Nazi. He's in prison because he won't fight. He's a cowardly old fart Nazi." Only David didn't hear any of this because David is deaf. And then a boy stepped forward and spat, and three girls immediately did the same. David walked up to the boy who had spit on Moger and hit him in the face. "Oi. Oi. Here's one 'oo wants a fight then," said the London children. But David didn't hear because David is deaf. "Get 'im! Get 'im!" shouted the girls, and then David heard the sound of bursting noses and tearing skin, and the sound of badly cut hair being torn out of bow-shaped slides. Finally he heard the sound of his own head being banged on the gravel, and then the London children broke and ran.

David picked up the spectacles and put them into the scratched and bitten hand of the boy whose father was in prison because he wouldn't go to war. Moger put the glasses on, and stood up and began to walk down the slope of green lawn, wiping the blood from his face with a dark blue handkerchief. David followed Moger and sat down with him under a tree. Moger

took his glasses off and wiped them and put them on, then took them off and wiped them again. When he had stopped crying he turned and said, "If I wanted to alter their stupid faces I'd do it on me own, see? I don't need nobody to do me fightin'. If I wants t' knock their bloddy teef in I do it meself, see?"

David put pressure on his vocal chords as he had been taught to do in class and tried some words. For Moger it was worth it. "Why don't you?" he said.

"For why?" said Moger. "Why am I going to knock their flippin' teef down their froats? Because they're stupid? Because they don't know that there's more van one way to look at fings? No, mate. Not me."

"I would," said David.

"Would yuh now, kid? What's yer name anyway?"

"David."

"Mine's Moger Brown."

They shook hands.

"Ow old are yer, kid?"

"Ten," said David.

"I'm firteen. Look, kid. Your old man doin' his bit for King and country? Yes, O.K. Well look, kid. You know part of the reason your old man is over there. It's because a lot of fucking Germans got together and fought they was right and everyone else was fucking stupid. You read *Mein Kampf?* No, well you ought to read *that* little piece of information on being right, mate."

There was silence for a few minutes under the tree. David was tired of talking. He fished out a piece of paper and pencil and wrote, "Why don't you tell somebody?"

Moger said, "*Lots* of people 'ave read Hitler's book. It's no secret what he thinks. Oh, y' mean about me. What for? I mean what flippin' for? If you're goin' to change the world y'

got to live in it, see. I mean, my old man, 'e don't 'ave no choice. He's in the pokey. You know, clink. Not only *vat*, he's in solitary. Has to be, or the other blokes in there would kill 'im, see, while the guards looked on laughin'. But 'e didn't run away and *I* ain't goin' to niver."

David wrote, "Are you going to change the world?"

Moger said, "Well, the way I sees it, kid, and the way me old man sees it is this. What's bin done 'as bin done. And it's got to be stopped somehow I suppose. But while this little bit of business is being put right there's got to be *somebody* doin' some thinkin', see?"

Moger Brown had thoughts of cosmic size, and a matching hand to write them in. A great round, looping hand that was much too big for exercise books, especially during the paper shortage, and so he used the walls. The school authorities objected to the amount of space his thought took up, but you see he had inherited all this largeness from his mother. You may remember how taken I was with the size of her apron when I saw her holding Moger on her lap as she sat next to her conscientiously objecting husband on the opposite page from the Jubilee chimp. The photograph was no lie. I saw her myself one Sunday when we were allowed to go into London because the daylight raids were going through a moderate stage.

Moger had said to me one day, "You know the trouble with us, mate? You and me? We're Greeks. We're philosophers, see? We like to reason. It's like what Plato said in *Phaedo*, we think that before philosophy came along to set her right, the soul was in a prison, 'wallowing in a mire of every sort of ignorance.' That's what we like to think. Reason everything out. Logic. That's the thing. Well, I tell you frankly, mate, that's *sun* thought. Logic and science and mathematics. We are anti-poets, and anti-love. You know that, do yer? That's sun thought. Once upon a time, before men found out that women couldn't have babies without the help of a man, there used to be moon thought. Intuition, magic, love and common sense. That's the way it used to be, once upon a time. There weren't no bombs, machine guns and universal conscription in

them days, mate. Here, I've got a sister, Nelly, 'oo is a relic from them days. She's got three rings of Venus on her neck. You want to see them? Come 'ome with me on Sunday and I'll show yer."

So we went into London on the school bus to see the rings of Venus that Nelly carried on her neck.

I would never have found the street myself. The houses looked as though they had originally been part of the same, never-ending box assembled on a belt and measured off at the end of the production line by a foreman with a list in his hand. All right, boys, this one's to go between Acacia Street and Dodely Road. Ten doors. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Chop. Next one's to go between Myrtle and Finfield. Fourteen doors. But Moger stood beside the driver and gave him sure instructions. First right. Here. Here. Now second street on your left and then left again. Now straight on till I tell y' ter stop. Right, here we are then, mate. See y' at four o'clock.

Moger lived in a twelve-door row, eighth door up from Kincaid, left-hand side. There were no preliminaries such as a gate or a garden path. Moger didn't knock. He just turned the handle, kicked the door open and said, "Mum! We're 'ome."

The inside was bigger than it had looked in the photograph. Or it could have been that Mrs. Brown had given some of her largeness to the war effort, but not enough to disappoint me. She came forward and took Moger by the cheeks and shook him. "Ow are y' luv?" And is this yer friend? David is it? Allo, David. Can 'e ear me?" No, Moger told her, but I could lip-read all right, only I didn't say much, it was too much of a strain. Ow, she said, well, that was all right then, and I didn't have to worry about not saying much. She didn't think there would be many awkward silences in *that* house between now and four o'clock. Right, luv? She laughed and I could see that in her generosity she had given not one but two teeth to each of her five children. She shook, and aprons and aprons of blue and black quivered. She dazzled me. But what was she

thinking of? Let her take my coat, and pretty soon Nelly would be in. She was out. That was her baby over there. Poor little mite. Did you tell David about your sister, Moger? Like as not he didn't. You know what boys are with their sisters. Nelly was a good girl. She had a good job in a grocery store. She was at work now. Doin' a bit of overtime, helpin' wif the supplies that came in this morning. Blimey, you could tell the world was upside-down, couldn't you, when delivery men came on Sundays. You knew the sky was fallin' then. But wif all the trains being used for the army boys you had to expect stuff when you saw it comin' into the goods yard, and now that so many warehouses was getting hit every night the importers felt safer if the goods was delivered to the shops as soon as it arrived. Well it made a nice bit of overtime for Nelly, and who's to say that she wasn't goin' to fin' a nice little bit of bacon for the dinner while she was there? Well, blimey she worked hard enough for it, poor little buggar. And now she had the baby and everything. And that husband of hers had to go and get himself blown up. Clumsy blighter. A fat lot of good he was goin' to do her now. A fat lot of good. Well, she had told her. She *told* her not to get married until after he came back. But you know young kids. Can't tell them nothing. And like as not she would have had the baby anyway. When a woman decides she wants a baby she's going to have a baby. And that's that. Right, luv?

"Mum," said Moger, "you don't half go on. Hey, David, come on out into the Victory garden and see me rabbits."

We went out into the Victory garden, some bare-looking bean poles and a row of cabbages. Four rabbit hutches were stacked against a tar-paper fence. Two were unoccupied. One sheltered a soft grey doe, so heavy with unborn she could hardly move. The last hutch held a big black buck with a milky eye. Moger said, "That's One-Eyed Jack." He tore off a cabbage leaf and offered it to the cage. One-Eyed Jack stood on his hind legs and pulled the leaf through the wire mesh. Moger said, "I see you've been at it again with Mabel, Jack. Jack's a real fucker. He and Mabel, the grey there, keep the whole neighborhood supplied with rabbit stew."

The sound of a baby crying came from inside the house. Moger said, Blimey, Nelly was 'ome, and I was to watch out for her, she was a regular witch. He said that Nelly, before she had the baby, had worked in Jessop's Tobacco Shop, and Old Man Jessop had his eye on her all right, and he kept on and on, you know, pinching her behind and saying wouldn't she, wouldn't she, and so Nelly had said yes she would if Mr. Jessop would swim naked under Westminster Bridge. But she had to be there to see it. So in the middle of the night they both took a bus down to Victoria Embankment and Mr. Jessop took off his clothes and jumped. And as soon as he was in the water Nelly run off and nabbed a policeman, and Mr. Jessop got fined for indecent exposure and swimming in a non-swimming zone, and his wife divorced him. And he never did get Nelly because right after that he had to go for a prostate and by the time his tiddly was working again Nelly was eight months in the family way. So watch out. Then we went in, and I met Nelly.

I didn't remember her from the photograph. Perhaps because I had been too young to take in Nelly's pastoral landscape. It took a little manhood to be attracted to that sort of survey work. Or perhaps Nelly had been somewhere out of the picture, in a corner of the room, fixing her soft yellow hair. Standing so long in front of the mirror that when she rejoined the family group her mother said, "Too late, Girlie, it's been took." For one reason or another I didn't meet Nelly in the photograph, I met her in the living room. She was bending over the baby, wiping his nose with a little white lace handkerchief saying, "Blow, luv. Blow. There's a good boy. Come on, blow." The baby didn't blow, but he seemed to like the white little hanky against his nose. He sort of leaned into it. Perhaps it smelled good. Perhaps it smelled of Nelly. She said, "I wish you would learn to blow y' nose," and then she tucked the hanky into her sleeve and smiled at me, and to Moger she said, "Allo, Stinker." Moger said, "Allo, Sis. I'd like you t' meet a friend of mine. David Olivier." "Oooh," said Nelly. "Fancy name. What is 'e? French? I 'ad some real French perfume once. Hey, parley voo fransay?" "No, 'e don't," said

Moger. " 'E don't parley nothing. 'E is deaf." "Go on," said Nelly, "a nice looking boy like that? Shame in' it?" "Watch yer mouf," said Moger. "He is, you know. He is readin' every word you say." "Go on," said Nelly. "Really, Frenchie? Are yer reading me lip? Oooh Gawd. It's almost like being on the radio." And she laughed. She lifted her head and laughed, and I saw, I saw, three rings of Venus on her neck. Mrs. Brown came out of the kitchen. She said she didn't know what we was laughin' for. Nelly hadn't brought 'ome no dinner. She didn't know what we was goin' to eat for dinner now. Nelly said, well it wasn't her fault. All the meat had been ordered. There wasn't one blessed piece that didn't have somebody's name on it, and she didn't want to lose her job did she? Mrs. Brown said that was right, but what was they goin' t' eat now, that's what she'd like to know. Nelly said what about One-Eyed Jack? Mrs. Brown said she supposed that would have to be it. They'd just have to hope that Mabel had a buck in her next litter, otherwise the rabbit market would be up a tree. Nelly had better see to it then while she peeled the potatoes, but mind she put a smock or something over that nice white blouse. She knew what bloodstains were. Once they was set in you couldn't get rid of them. Here, put this on. She held out a brown and yellow flowered smock and Nelly put it on. I watched Nelly's fingers like almost white butterflies visit each button and fasten it, travelling from her thighs to her ringed neck. "Let's go," she said, and as we went she rolled up her sleeves.

One-Eyed Jack was living out his last moments optimistically in Nelly's arms. She coddled him all the way down the garden path to the shed, and while we waited for Moger to drag back the unhinged shed door she put her lips close to Jack's flattened ears and called him "Dahwlin."

A very successful clutter had been worked up around Mr. Brown's precisely arranged tools while he had been away. Moger's bicycle was suspended from the corrugated iron roof to ensure a maximum circulation of air round the tires. A collection of stark black geraniums stood on a walnut veneer

sideboard that was being stored for a female member of the family who, being made of less substantial stuff than her sisters, had evacuated to the country. The tablecloths, conscientiously provided for the protection of this piece of furniture, hung on the antlers of a seven-tine stag who for years had appeared to poke his proud head through the chimney piece into the front room and who now grew straight out of the workbench and stared into the jagged teeth of Mr. Brown's saw, as punishment for falling off the wall and frightening Mrs. Brown to death every time a bomb dropped. The floor was littered with wood that Nelly and Mrs. Brown together had salvaged from neighborhood bomb sites.

Nelly, still holding Jack in the crook of her arm, stepped neatly over a pile of blistered green paint and rusty nails and selected a hammer with a heavy handle from Mr. Brown's workmanlike collection of tools. Then she kissed Jack on the top of his black head and swung him up by his back legs and brought the hammer down on the back of his neck. Jack began to drip slowly from his open mouth. Nelly turned and smiled, waggling the suddenly boneless body in Moger's face. "There you are," she said. "The poor little bugger didn't even have time to kick. Now then, 'and me over that tin tub." Moger took down the bathtub from its hook on the wall and Nelly brought a small sharp knife from her overall pocket, and we left her sitting on the edge of a basket chair that had once refused an impossible request to support half of Mrs. Brown's weight, up to her white elbows in blood.

Moger took me down the street to see where a hole in the ground replaced the school he used to go to, and when we got back the poor little bugger was in the oven. I so badly wanted to congratulate Nelly on her artistic performance that I asked Moger for a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote her a note. I said, "I think you did a jolly fine job with the rabbit," and gave it to her to read. And she must have been pleased because she lifted her head in a laugh again and showed me the rings for a second time. Then she said, "Oh go and wash yer dirty 'ands. Dinner's nearly ready."

Jack was a bit chewy, but after he had made the supreme sacrifice I thought it only right that I should eat all that I had been given of him.

See, Ginnie? See the fantastic luck my talisman brought me? Blue and black daisies, a Victory garden, the killing of One-Eyed Jack all ringed round with Venus above the collar of a white blouse, and above it all Mrs. Brown who had injected her cosmic genes into Moger's wall-written thoughts and who gave her strength to Mr. William Brown (confined in solitary inside a silver frame on the mantelpiece), a photograph, a token presence of the man who was spoken to, shouted at and asked questions, but who never made an answer because he was too busy doing the thinking for an anti-poetic world.

Almost at the end of the war, Moger and his mother had been killed by a bomb while they were visiting an aunt in Kentish Town.

The principal of the London School called David into his office and told him. And David imagined the bomb smacking into the teacups and smashing Moger's glasses. He said, "Thank you, sir," and went back to his class, writing a letter to Moger as he crossed the highly polished hall.

Dear Moger,

Did it hurt much?

Regards, your Friend,

David.

And so the very last thing that Moger Brown taught me was how to parley with the pure, oracular dead.

* * *

Then, long, long after I had left school, when finally I was old enough to appreciate her instruction, I was taught by Lillian. She taught me how to make a poultice from a woman's breath. "Come," she said, the first time. "Come. It's cold on the floor, and I won't bite you." But she did bite me. She bit into my flesh, and the wound throbbed when I saw her sitting and standing and smiling at me in the daylight, so that in the dark-

ness I took healing from her again. She let me touch her until my fever spurted out and ran cool on her skin. When her belly became too big between us she kneeled beside me and stuffed my mouth with tongue until my mouth was full, and then the tongue ran down and overflowed my navel, down and down to where my nether tongue was crying for a mouth, and took Lillian's mouth to empty itself of the hot white sweetness.

One day when it was already growing dark Lillian was returning from the Parish Post Office with a loaf of bread and some milk. It was late and Timothy was inclined to dawdle, so Lillian made him ride in the rickety little pushchair she used for shopping. Harry Abbee, coming home from a day of pruning his father's trees, chanced to meet this woman on the dark and lonely road with the branches of the trees meeting high above their heads. He had been in Chapel the day that Mrs. Cliquot had renounced her daughter before God. He had been deeply moved. There had been some talk at that time that the Nazi Woman's head be shaved. But no one had ever done it. And now here he was alone with the Nazi Woman on the evening road with his father's pruning shears in his hand. He felt the Spirit moving within him. Lillian took no notice of the passerby at first. She wasn't in the habit of looking into people's faces. But the man slowed down after he had passed her, and then he called to her to stop in the Name of the Lord. Lillian's heart jumped into her mouth, and her feet moved faster. But the man came behind her, shouting that he was the Instrument of the Lord, catching hold of her hair, Blessed be His Name, hold still and let me cut your hair. Lillian screamed and turned, struggling, and the pram rolled a little way on its own into the darkness and Timothy began to cry, while Harry cut the Nazi Woman's hair as best he could with one hand, and because of the way she struggled the shears bit deep into her flesh in some places, so that when he had finished she staggered into the ditch covered with blood and clutching at her belly where the unholy child was moving before its time. Harry Abbee took a handful of grass and wiped off the blades of his father's shears and went on his way singing a rousing hymn.

And Timothy was wheeled to his grandmother's house and grudgingly taken in.

Harriet Norbert asked her husband, the Reverend Cuthbert Norbert, if the Church of England shared any of the responsibility for Lillian's death. The Reverend Cuthbert Norbert said he didn't think so.

David balled up his fists and put them in his eyes, which was the closest anybody came to weeping for Lillian Cliquot.

The funeral services for Lillian Cliquot were held in the same room where the seeds of her death had been sown. The little chapel at the end of John Le Mason's potato field was crammed to the corners of its whitewashed walls. All the women were in black, except for Lillian Cliquot's mother who sat in the front pew wearing a coat and hat of defiant blue, shushing young Timothy every time he spoke. A whisper went round the crowded room that the coffin was coming and the men took off their hats. Brother Simon came slowly through the door, preceding six men who bore what was left of Lillian on their backs.

Brother Simon was a long thin man with a little pot belly. His face was cavernous and deeply lined, and a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles sat on the bridge of the hooked and porous nose, enlarging the fire of his eyes into a consuming roar. Suddenly he turned on his flock, shouting, "Sinners!" pointing with a finger to his right and left as his voice resounded from the walls. And in this manner Brother Simon reached the pulpit and slowly climbed the steps.

The men thankfully let Lillian down onto a couple of trestles and went to their places, which, as a reward for their labors, were right at the front of Chapel, next to Mrs. Cliquot.

Brother Simon opened his dogeared Bible and read, " 'He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.' " Brother Simon paused, listening to the echoes of his voice, and then he repeated, " 'I will appoint thee a place whither he

shall flee.' Fellow Sinners, brother Harry did not lie in wait for this woman. Fellow Sinners, I say to you that God, the God of Right, and Truth, and Love, delivered this woman, this sinner, this fallen angel, this strayed sheep, into his hand. And the act that Brother Harry committed was an act of righteousness. And Mercy. For this departed sister can now go to her Purgatory. She can now go through the Hell Fire and cleanse her soul from Sin. She who consorted with the devil will again be pure. And this I *know*, Fellow Sinners," Brother Simon beat the breast of his pinstripe suit, "This I *know*. For this morning the Word. The Promise. As written in Exodus, Chapter twenty-one, verses twelve and thirteen. This morning the promise was fulfilled. Brother Harry was appointed to a place. He has gone to an asylum on the mainland. He will not be put to death." "Amen." "Amen." came scattered from the congregation, while in the back row Harry Abbee's sister and mother sobbed loudly. "Amen!" said Mrs. Cliquot.

Brother Simon turned towards the coffin and said, "How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! And how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger. Brethren, let us pray."

He went down from the pulpit and stood where Lillian's head with its butchered hair was resting in the wooden box, and he placed his hand upon the lid and bowed his head.

Those of the flock who were fortunate enough to have found a seat bent nearly double in their chairs, while those around the wall pressed their chins firmly on their chests. Everybody closed their eyes. "Close your eyes!" said Mrs. Cliquot to Timothy.

Suddenly Brother Simon raised his head and shouted to the plaster ceiling, " 'For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.' " "Amen!" This was a familiar line and the responses were firm. "Amen!"

"Fellow sinners. Let us join our voices together as one voice. Let our cry be heard in the heavens as one cry. Let us speak. Let us give voice to this defiled lump of clay here be-

fore us. That she may be heard and the gates of Purgatory be opened unto her. Let us say together the twenty-sixth verse of chapter nineteen of the Book of Job.

" 'And though after my skin . . .' "

" 'And though after my skin,' " said the voices, " 'worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.' "

"Amen," said Brother Simon. "Fellow sinners. We have done our bounden duty." Mrs. Cliquot's sister-in-law, who had helped with the laying out of Lillian, had been bothered since the beginning of the service by a fly which buzzed around the coffin and alighted on what she had so carefully washed and laid away, making it unclean. As Brother Simon turned again to climb into his pulpit she couldn't resist stepping from her seat and flapping at the fly with the back of her hand. In her furtiveness she was made clumsy, and her hand banged against the coffin with a hollow sound, scaring the daylights out of her and many of the women present. The organist, thinking this was the signal for the hymn, started into "I would not live alway," and the congregation, taken by surprise, turned hastily to the hymn number which was chalked on a slate above Brother Simon's head, and caught up in the middle of the second line. Brother Simon, put out by this change of plan, deigned to join in a word here and a stanza there, while his eyes roved and searched out the culprit who was flustered all to pieces by his look.

The bearers took up their places by the coffin during the last verse as they had been told to do, and as the hymn ended Lillian was carried out of the Chapel, while all around her the hollow scrape of chairs betrayed the flock's eagerness to follow her to the burial ground.

John Le Mason watched from his potato field, and he saw his family crowded at the farmhouse window to watch the funeral go by. The hawthorn bushes very brown and bare, the rooks flying and the women walking very black in the cold white air, and Mrs. Cliquot's hat looking as though it was going to Easter Sunday.

They entered the cemetery, which wasn't far away—an old cemetery where some of the gravestones were up and some were down. The trees had not been cut back here because there was enough fertilizer in the ground to make the grass grow thick without the help of extra rain and sun. The burying was very quick.

A raw red hole had been made ready, and Lillian was put in as Brother Simon said above the cawing of the rooks, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble."

The handfuls of earth.

"Earth . . . Dust . . . Ashes . . ."

And those who were near the back of the crowd began to move away.

But Brother Simon would not let them go lightly. He followed them, shouting, "Miserable comforters are ye all," and then reminded them in more conversational tones that although this was not a regular service there was nothing to prevent them from putting a little something in the collection box which he just happened to have in his pocket.

Mrs. Cliquot tarried behind the others, taking young Timothy behind a bush to spend a bursting little penny. And when he had finished, Lillian Cliquot was left alone in the darkness which may be felt.

* * *

Ginnie walked in the white path of the sun, over pale sea-drained sand and dark ankle-deep seaweed, through water and from rock to rock, toward the Kingdom House where David was. From behind the Kingdom the sea knew that she was coming and talked about it in enormous whispers, making the seagulls laugh until they cried. A long way behind her a dog barked and yet Ginnie trod softly, walking so that the legs of her jeans did not brush each other and break the silence. She tried to imagine what he would be doing when he saw her. David would feel her coming with that mysterious sense of his. He would look up, not surprised, as though he was expecting

her. Perhaps he was watching her now, reading a page of his book and then glancing out the window to see how near she had come. No. David would be in his basement room, and the room had no windows, except one high up, facing the sea. What did David do now with all those hours he used to spend shut away from everyone, while Lillian in her laundry room worked slowly and carefully through endless rows of knitting, hushing Timothy and never once knocking on David's door with a cup of tea or a question? What did David do with all those hours now that there was no one to shut the door against?

Amanda had written, "I suppose you will hear of it one way or another (not, I fervently hope, from David, since that would mean you are still in correspondence with him), and so I shall tell you that Lillian Cliquot has been squalidly murdered. I cannot bring myself to go into the distasteful details, but I'm sure, if your morbid curiosity is strong enough, you will find them out for yourself. As for me, I am sorry about the horrid way in which she died, but I can think no more than 'there's an end to a pretty mess.' I hope that you are doing better in French this term, as your last report . . ."

There had been no word from David, and his spasmodic messages to her, rushing in sloping black lines over exercise paper, had stopped since Lillian wasn't there to find them and direct them to Ginnie with a looping, unsteady hand. Ginnie's awkward little note had never been posted. *There's an end . . . there's a pretty mess . . .*

Ginnie stopped at the edge of a gully that looked too deep to wade through. She walked a little way west, but the gully seemed to get wider and nearer the sea, so she turned and walked east. Perhaps she had left it too late. Perhaps the tide had already turned and was flooding in across her path. She cursed, stumbling over the slippery rocks, squinting against the sun for a glimpse of shallow water. For the first time she resented the destruction of the causeway. Ginnie was far enough out from shore now to see the ruined end of it, a pile of scattered granite blocks upon the sand, as though an angry, fearsome tide had swept through the solidly built tie with Is-

land, rendering it useless. Ginnie poked her tongue in the direction of the messy gap. A tribute to the effectiveness of the fine, severing blow that she had watched and applauded, a long time ago it seemed. Then she thought, "Well, I'm a clot. I could probably use the rubble as stepping stones." And she set off at a slippery half run, knowing that once the tide turned the gully would get deeper almost by the minute. Had David watched her searching to and fro like a hound on a river bank? Was he about to come forward, out of the shadow of the house, cupping his hands round his mouth to shout to her, waving his arm to show her the direction of the path? But no. That was not his way. He would only stand and watch, more interested in seeing if she could find the path for herself than in her arrival.

She must get across now. If he was watching there must be no hesitation. How high the causeway looked when you were under it. And these great granite blocks were the same ones that had been tossed, so carelessly in the air. They were covered with weed now and Ginnie could feel a nervous itch in the soles of her feet as she launched herself out onto the first block, as though her nerves were using radar to find a landing place. Dear God, dear God, dear God. Ginnie clenched her teeth against the imagined impact of her head against a sharp piece of granite. How strange it would be if she should hit her head and die. Here. Halfway between the Kingdom and the shore. Surely he would come running then, and he would bend over her, his face in anguish . . . but how had it been when Marion died, lying in the snow? He had just stood and stared. Just stood and stared. Dear God, dear God . . . don't let me slip. No—no, she mustn't pray. If this performance was for David then she shouldn't pray. David wouldn't be proud of that. "Try to imagine that God does not exist," he had written. "Try to imagine that there is no help outside yourself." She slipped and lost her breath. Oh damn. Her stomach was shaking. I want to use my hands. I want to crawl. The tide is coming in. The water is black. There is no help outside myself. I am the one who is getting across. My legs. My sense of balance. My body. I wonder who will be the first

to see my body? I wonder if Amanda noticed that I'd borrowed a razor. She wouldn't mind. She'd laugh if she knew I'd shaved off all the hair on my crotch. Well, it's a funny thing to do I suppose. Amanda doesn't. She's got lots of hair. You can see it bulging under her swimsuit sometimes. And when she sits down she gets square rolls in her middle. I don't. Uncle Johnathan says I have a . . . a nubile body. Nubile. I'm nubile. And Amanda laughed and said he was a dirty old man.

Ginnie jumped off the last block onto dry sand and stuck her hands into the pockets of her anorak. "You see, that is the secret. To think of something else." She was talking to her future, faceless children now. "Fear is a useful emotion sometimes, but not when it interferes with something that has to be done." A little note in red ink at the bottom of her English paper. "You have a facile turn of phrase. Please do not use it to cover up a thoroughly disorganized composition." If David wasn't watching, perhaps she could creep up and stand in front of him before he saw her . . . and then he would look up . . . and then what? A kiss? No, hardly that. A handshake? No, no. Well, he would look up and she would be there and then he would . . . make her a cup of coffee. There it was. There was the Kingdom. If she had brought her camera she could have taken a photo of it and written on the back "The house seen from the land side beach," so that the girls at school could really see that she had a house which stood on a rock all by itself in the middle of a bay. "Describe the house in which you live."

"My house stands all by itself on a rock in the middle of the bay. The main part of the house is two stories high, with six windows across the top and four at the bottom with a door in the middle. A piece has been built onto the side of the house like the short arm of an 'L' and this is the kitchen at the back and the garage in the front. It may seem funny to you to have a garage on a rock, but you see, we used to have quite a wide causeway that you could drive over, only, after my mother died it was . . . destroyed. (I wonder what happened to the car. Is it still in the garage? I suppose it must be.) At the back,

in the arm of the 'L' there is a little square garden. A lawn really with flowers round the edge and a cherry tree in the middle. In a hot summer everything in the garden dies, except the cherry tree, which has found a secret rooting place. And on the kitchen side of the house, on a lower level than the kitchen, sort of built out of the rock, are two rooms. A basement storage room where we used to keep potatoes, but where my brother David lives now, and a laundry room where Lillian lives—lived." But that would not tell them how the house looked now, against the winter sun. David was not, after all, outside the house, and the door to his basement room was closed. Ginnie raised her hand to knock and then remembered that it was no good knocking if you wanted to be let in by David. He couldn't hear. She carefully turned the door handle. Slowly, so he would not see it turn. But the door didn't open. She pushed against it with her body, in case it was stuck. No. It was locked. Ginnie ran up the steps to the front door. That was locked too. The lion's head on the heavy door knocker grinned down, mocking her. She gave it three hard, useless raps, just to teach it a lesson. The echoes bounced around the hall, sounding out its emptiness. Ginnie put her nose against one of the living room windows, cupping her hands round her face, half expecting David to be on the other side of the shadowed glass, staring back at her. But the living room too was full of long standing emptiness. Down the other side of the steps without looking into the playroom window. David wouldn't be in there, where her mother had been lying once in a black quilted coffin. Round the end of the house into the garden, stepping carefully, from habit, over the border of scrabbled grass and weeds where dahlias and forget-me-nots had grown. She walked across the lawn, ducking under the wild arms of the trellis rose. Through the glass panels of the back door she could see the Aga cooker was covered with cold, grey ash. A bowl stood on the table, and two cups. That was all. Ginnie straightened up and the rose thorns reached out on the sea wind and caught hold of her back and her hair. She detached them, gingerly and without impatience. Probably, all the while she had been searching all around the house, David had been sitting on the rocks below the windows of the laun-

dry room, fishing or staring into the closed world of a rock pool. Suddenly Ginnie was taken by the notion that at this very minute David was standing up and turning slowly toward the house, going back to his basement room and closing the heavy door, shutting himself back into his soundproofed world, never knowing she had come. She tore herself free, granting the rose bush its trophy of bright hair, and ran, rounding the corner of the kitchen into a sudden shock of emptiness. A seagull lifted itself slowly, disdainfully from a rock and settled in the sea. Well no, how silly of her. The basement room door had been locked, hadn't it? David had written, "Be conscious of the fact that, as you grow older, you will become more capable of the muddled, emotional thinking peculiar to woman." How did he know all these things? She sighed like a traveller getting up from a resting place, and walked the last few yards to the laundry room window. David was lying on Lillian's old bed, his face half covered by a pillow. A flux of joy and then a scalding rush of panic. Then she noticed the tiny feather fluttering as David breathed out, and the panic drained away, leaving her cold and irritated that she could not rouse him by knocking on the glass. I could throw a stone through the window. Perhaps that would wake him. Perhaps it wouldn't. And David would never bother to have the broken pane repaired, suffering the draft as he cooked his meals on Lillian's electric hot plate. If it were left to him, the whole place could fall down round his ears and he'd never notice. It was thought with benevolence, but a small proprietary voice at the back of Ginnie's mind whispered that there was scandal in such neglect. It was her house too. He will wake up soon. I might as well wait. The tide has come up a long way since I've been here. I couldn't get back just now, even if I wanted to. Ginnie sat down, resting her back against the laundry room wall. She listened to the sandpipers. Sandpipers. The pipers of the sand. Pipers of sand. Dreamers of dreams. She thought their whistling burble was more like atmospherics on short-wave radio. But she supposed that they had been named before radio was invented. When the piper played beside the drummer boy, marching into war. Before that. When the piper called the tune, or was

it the fiddler? When the piper must be paid. The party's over . . . the piper must be . . . there's an end. She stood up and looked in the window. David was still asleep. Ginnie wandered slowly back into the garden, and stood in the high, wintered grass, under the cherry tree. What a mess the garden was. And nothing lovely in it except for a great yellow splash of forsythia, and the shadow of the cherry tree, Chinese etched against wall. She had once poured lemonade here, and caught her foot in the wheel of her tricycle here. And that was where she had pitched her tent, crawling into it balancing her tea on a plate so that she could eat in the hot, green smelling inside. And here she had gone bounty hunting for snails among the dahlias at the rate of one halfpenny each, and exactly here she had trodden on a bee in the clover and stood screaming in pain from its sting. In all these things her mother was present as a color, a movement seen out of the corner of Ginnie's eye. And this had been the place of the snowmen, rare creatures built from mystery and delight. There had been one standing here when her mother died.

Ginnie walked slowly over the grass, round to the front of the house and out to the edge of the little bit of causeway that had been left to the Kingdom. The tide washed through the breach, covering the blocks she had used for stepping stones.

What a fine noise they had made when they all came tumbling down. The only noise she had heard that day three years ago through the snow and the thick exaggerated hush of friends and relatives in black moving from the room where her mother was muffled in quilting to the living room, crossing and crossing the hall until it was dimmed with dark cloth. The black velvet dress that Amanda had brought for her added its length to the darkness as Ginnie sat on the stairs and watched the mourning going on below her. Then Amanda had come to her and said, "Pack a few things in a bag, darling. Just whatever you can't bear to leave behind. There's no need for you to spend another night in this house. Until you're older and stronger and can understand. Then you can come back if you want to. When . . . when David is no longer here perhaps. Go along now. We're almost ready to start."

Ginnie stood up, conscious of the heaviness of velvet against her calves, and went slowly up the stairs. She paused at the landing window, the only one in the house without a curtain that could be drawn in pious respect for the dead, watching the snow fall endlessly into the sea. "Go along," said Amanda from the bottom of the stairs, and Ginnie waited one more moment and then gathered her skirt in both hands and took the rest of the stairs two at a time.

Even the light in her bedroom had lost its power to diminish darkness. She stood by the door, her hand still on the light switch. *Take just whatever you can't bear to leave behind.* Slowly she went into the room and slowly she picked over the collection of childish things, weighing each one in her hand to see if it would fit into the yawning emptiness beginning somewhere inside of her until one by one her treasures were discarded and the emptiness had not been filled. Ginnie pulled a little red leather case from the bottom of her wardrobe and put in a clean pair of pajamas and her hairbrush. That was all she could think of to put in it. Her toothbrush, of course. That was downstairs in the bathroom. She went to a window overlooking the causeway and lifted a corner of the curtain. A hearse had been backed very close to the front door. Someone was handing out wreaths and crosses of dark green and pale flowers to six men in tall black hats who put them inside a brass rail on the wide black roof of the unnatural looking car. And when there was a pause in the flowering the men discreetly stamped their black feet and hit their black hands against their long black coats, each one twice as black than black against the snow. In a queer way they pleased her. It was like looking at a painting that moved. Suddenly Ginnie felt terribly tired. She wanted to crawl into her bed and pull the covers up around her ears and go to sleep.

Amanda came into the room. "Have you finished, pet? We're nearly ready."

"No, I was just . . . I was just . . . looking for something."

"Well, hurry up, darling. What have you got? Pajamas, hairbrush. Toothbrush?"

"Downstairs," said Ginnie.

"Is that all?"

"I have to go and say goodbye to David." It had just occurred to Ginnie what it was she couldn't bear to leave behind.

"You really don't have to be bothered to be polite, dear, at a time like this. He probably won't even notice we've gone."

"I have to go down and get my toothbrush anyway." Ginnie darted out of the room and down the stairs. Amanda leaned over the bannister and shouted in a stage whisper, "Ginnie. Ginnie." She sounded very annoyed. Ginnie ran through the living room full of standing, murmuring people, and behind her dodging back, the six men with their hats removed came out of the playroom with the coffin on their shoulders. Amanda was held at the foot of the stairs until the body-length procession had moved through the hall.

David and Lillian were both in the kitchen when Ginnie came into it with great gulping leaps and stopped with her back up against the table and her face towards the door. Lillian, who had been holding Timothy on her lap, got up and went down the basement stairs to her laundry room. David stood with his hands in his pockets looking speculatively at the obscured sky. Amanda appeared in the kitchen doorway. Her teeth were set as though they wanted to tear Ginnie to pieces. Ginnie shouted, "I'm not coming. I'm not coming with you. Ever! Ever!" "Oh Ginnie, for God's sake don't make a scene. I can't stand much more. What do you all take me for? A sucker? Now get your toothbrush and your coat and come along before I lose my temper." Ginnie wheeled and made a scuttling dash across the kitchen, falling almost headlong down the basement stairs and David, his hands still in his pockets, stood casually in Amanda's path challenging her with eyes as pale, as unmarked as the sea outside. Amanda shouted over his head, "I shall come back! I shall come back for you, and you'd better be ready for me. Do you hear?" She turned and walked back to the living room, lowering her black veil to hide her anger.

David came down into the basement room and put on his coat. Little Timothy said, "Out. Out." "No love," said Lillian, "not today. Here Ginnie, you better put this on. David has something he wants us to see." She handed Ginnie a thick sweater and Ginnie put it on over her funeral dress and went to stand beside Lillian in the basement room doorway. The hearse with its various burdens of white and black was moving slowly across the causeway, drawing the other cars behind it. "She's gone," said Ginnie, and Lillian, not knowing whether the girl spoke of her mother or of Amanda, could say nothing to comfort her.

David was kneeling on the ground fiddling with something, glancing up from time to time to see how the pageant was progressing. At last there was a gap in the regular spacing of the cars and the gap lengthened until it became the end of the cortege. By then the roof of the hearse had become a diminishing and peculiar shape, just visible if you squinted through the snow. David was watching very carefully now, making very sure of an important fact. Suddenly he seemed to fall . . . no, not fall . . . *lunge* forward, reminding Ginnie of a figure seen in a film, thrusting a knife into his own belly, then there came a tremendous roar, the roar of a thousand storm waves breaking at once, and the causeway flew away high into the air and then dropped back and disappeared into the sea. David had blown up the causeway. David had . . . Ginnie clapped her hands and began to laugh . . . David had blown . . . she laughed and clapped and gasped for air . . . her body shook with unbearable laughter and she wanted to be sick. David scooped up a handful of snow and slapped it on Ginnie's face and blessedly she stopped laughing and began to cry.

And now Ginnie stood on the Kingdom side of a causeway that had been rent asunder three years ago with a roar that had stopped her mother's funeral procession, when David was eighteen and she was almost ten. The rift was filled with water and the other side of the causeway was empty. As she turned away Ginnie remembered very clearly the frantic, frightened excitement that had begun when David set her down beside

him in Lillian's laundry room with a pencil and a piece of paper in front of her and a pen and paper in front of himself while the dark snow was still falling, writing for her things she could not understand, inciting some enormous undreamed-of creature to snout and scrabble at the layers of her mind. David had written to Ginnie of Llew-Llaw and Blodued and Arreahnrod, the sow-who-eats-her-farrow, and Osiris and Isis and of the recurring myths of virgin birth and resurrection. He wrote to her of a time when the Moon Goddess was worshipped and women ruled the earth in the ancient magic of her strength. And of a time when men overthrew the Moon Goddess and put a sun god called Apollo in the heavens—the god of men and logic and machines. ". . . so you see that I know women have inherited great forgotten power which they exercise with instinct and with magic but they do not *think*. The Christian Church is all that is left of their ruined kingdom. The Moon Goddess, disguised as the tame and sexless Virgin Mary, still holds onto men's minds, and as long as she is there, men will not be able to overcome their animal natures and develop into *pure thought* and save themselves from destruction by the machines which they invent. She has caused a web of mystery to choke the one man who probably came nearest to being pure thought. Christ was a man, and Christ was a thinker born before his time, and when he spoke of love he meant absence of fear and absence of greed—the two primeval monsters that threaten our existence. But the goddess wanted this to be forgotten. She has diverted attention from the real ugliness in man's nature and put the blame on sex, calling it the sin of sins, begging us to forget it, and so cleverly focussing man's thought on it, and therefore on her. And if she is biding her time, thinking that she will come again into her royal estate by teaching her women to pretend they are men until the time is ripe for a takeover, and if by chance she should succeed, then there would be a great chaos and great destruction anyway, for women hate machines and would destroy a civilization in order to be rid of them. Do you understand any of this?" David had written on both sides of his paper and then had taken Ginnie's paper and used both sides of that. There was a little space at the bottom of the

page, and Ginnie picked up her pencil and wrote, "No." Lillian, who was leaning over David's shoulder reading the closely written sheets, laughed and said, "What he means, love, is that he's scared of us." She bent down and turned David's face close to hers. "You're a big old scaredy cat, you, eh?" she said, and kissed him.

David smiled and turned his face away, then picking up his pen he turned one of the sheets of paper round and wrote in the margin, "I just wanted her to try and understand what I'm going to do when it stops snowing." Lillian said, "I think you've done enough for one day." Ginnie yawned. "Come on, young lady," said Lillian, "what you need is sleep. We've all had enough for one day." Ginnie nodded and stood up, but then she reached over and tore another sheet of paper from the writing pad. She wrote, "Will Amanda come back?" David read it and moved his head in a gesture which meant yes, he was afraid she would. "When?" David took the pencil from Ginnie's hand. "I think she will come on the next high tide after it stops snowing. She will come in a boat because she will think it is the easiest way to get you away from here. She won't fancy dragging you, screaming and kicking through the mud at low tide." David paused and looked at Ginnie's face for a long while, then he wrote, "I advise you to go with her quietly and willingly when she comes for you. You have made a decision in your own mind where you want to be. It doesn't matter if you go with her now." A long hurting surge of tears filled Ginnie's throat and flooded up the back of her nose and into her eyes. She shut her eyes quickly and held her breath. Gradually the flood drained away, leaving a terrible ache in her throat. Lillian said, "I've put a water bottle in David's bed for you. Now take these aspirin and have a nice long sleep."

The snow fell until early the next morning. Before it was light David woke Ginnie up, gave her a cup of tea and threw a pair of her thick tweed trousers on the foot of the bed. He left the room and came back again with his coat on, carrying a lantern and a can of whitewash and a wide brush which he put

down on the floor. Then he sat down on a potato barrel and waited until she was dressed. He had something else he wanted her to see. The something he had written of yesterday. Lillian, still lying in bed with the blankets up to her chin, shouted, "Are you dressed up warm? Put my coat on, and Timmy's scarf." Timothy, hearing his name mentioned sat up in his bed and said, "I want to go out too." "No you don't, love," said his mother, "it's the middle of the night. Only lunatics go out at this hour." And she turned over and pulled the blankets right over her head.

David and Ginnie walked out into the sharp-smelling morning. It was colorless and deeply silent. The earth was lighter than the sky, and every line that was not essential to holding the familiar world together had been wiped out by the snow, so that the familiar world was strange and severely beautiful. Ginnie thought it was like walking out onto a star. David held the lantern up to see how much impression it made on the half light, and then blew it out. Ginnie followed after him as he walked towards a rock that faced back towards the far shore, in the direction from which Amanda must come. David stopped in front of the rock and put out his hand to flick away the snow from a strange little outcropping, a funny little round pillar that thrust out from the rock and pointed to some point halfway between the earth and the sky. David knelt on one knee and prized open the top from the whitewash can with his penknife, and stirred the can a bit with a stick he took from his duffel coat pocket before he dipped into it with his brush. He stood with his head on one side, considering the rock while the brush dripped white on white on the snow, then his arm went up like the blade of a windmill and he began to paint.

At first Ginnie couldn't make out what it was that David was painting. She made patterns of her footsteps, moving farther and farther from David to find unspoilt snow, but always ending up in front of the granite surface that David sometimes slashed at with his brush and sometimes touched with infinite care. At the end of Ginnie's first pattern David had completed a head with long flowing hair. Two patterns later

a pair of outstretched arms had appeared, and after she had executed a large and exact square with one footprint in the middle, Ginnie came back to the rock to find that the figure had a body with stark unpainted granite ribs. The funny little uprising granite pillar was growing out of the lower end of its belly, just perfectly at the point where the legs began. David straightened up from finishing the legs and painted the little pillar too, slapping at it gaily with his brush. He turned and grinned at her, and put down his brush. "Do you know who it is?" he asked with his hands. Ginnie shook her head. David's hands moved again. "Guess." Ginnie looked at the figure for a long time, remembering what David had written yesterday. Finally she turned to David and said, "Christ." David nodded. Ginnie frowned and made a circling motion with one hand round the top of her head. David's moving fingers guessed, "Crown?" Ginnie nodded and made spiky movements round her head, wincing with each one. "Crown of thorns?" Ginnie nodded hard. David thought for a while and then he shrugged and smiled and went back to the rock, took out his handkerchief and spat on it. Ginnie watched him wiping away paint until a circlet of dark thorns appeared on the figure's forehead. David turned to her again and Ginnie smiled very graciously. David beckoned for her to come closer, and when she was near him he pointed to the little pillar and raised his eyebrows. Ginnie looked at it carefully. Yes, it was like Timothy's, only Timmy's didn't stand up. She looked at David and said, "Penis." David clapped Ginnie on the back and threw back his head. "Yes! Yes!" he said. Then he asked her, "Who has one?" Ginnie hesitated, and David's fingers moved again, "Who has one?" "Timothy," she said. David picked up the stick he had used for stirring paint, and wrote in large letters in the snow, "Timothy has one. I have one. *All* men have one." Then he held out a hand to tell her to stay where she was, and disappeared inside the house. He came back with a potato barrel which he placed squarely in front of the rock and stood on it, so that he could reach above the figure's head, then he motioned Ginnie to hand up the paint and the brush. Over the crown of thorns, with great care, he wrote the legend, CHRIST WAS A DAMN GOOD MAN.

Ginnie was standing beside the figure when Amanda came for her.

When Lillian had seen the Christ she had laughed and said, "Ah, but fancy, eh? You'd think that rock had been made for it." And the rock was perfect. At high tide the manly Christ, leaning over the water with the inclination of the rock, stretched out his arms to the oncoming launch. Ginnie recognized Amanda's blue ski jacket in the prow, and behind that a large splash of yellow that was the Reverend Norbert's wife in oilskins. Mrs. Norbert called, "Cooeee, Virginia." Amanda, tightly belted, her hands in the pockets of her slacks, made no movement, but her eyes narrowed behind her sunglasses, watching to see which way the filly would bolt. Ginnie, neat and clean and quiet, picked up her little red suitcase and waved. She thought she would burst from standing still. She wanted to jump up and down and point to the figure and shout, "Look! Look!" But that would have spoiled the joke, so she stood where she was and waited. She wanted them to come right up close, so that they could appreciate the niceties of what David had drawn.

The boatman put the boat into neutral gear and let the launch idle forward on a wash and bump gently up against a granite ledge. Amanda steadied the boat and helped Mrs. Norbert out. The Vicar's wife ascended, yellow and smiling, until she stood below Ginnie. Ginnie let out a shout of laughter, for Mrs. Norbert's face was exactly on a level with Christ's little whitewashed pillar. The lady who had come prepared to soothe drastic tears was thinking that one could never really predict the reactions of children, when her smiling, puzzled eyes focussed on what was directly in front of her nose, and then travelled upward over the granite ribs and thorn-driven hair until they read, CHRIST WAS A DAMN GOOD MAN. The meaning became clear, and caused a hideous clash of yellow and dark, suffused red. It was Amanda coming up behind her who stopped her from falling. Ginnie, laughing like a demon, allowed herself to be handed into the boat. Up on the ledge Mrs. Norbert's oilskin cape, which she had torn open in the

sudden outrageous heat, rustled and cracked. "A wicked, wicked boy . . . what a wicked, wicked notion to put in a child's head . . . you don't suppose there's a chance that she doesn't understand, do you?"

"Not a chance," said Amanda. "You can be certain he made sure of that."

"Well, you were right, my dear, we should have come last night, snow or no snow. I really don't know what Cuthbert is going to say. I don't even know if I shall be able to tell him." Ginnie sat beside Amanda and looked back at the Kingdom House. The white figure gradually became confused with the other whiteness of the snow, and at last it disappeared altogether. . . . *You have made a decision in your own mind where you want to be. It doesn't matter if you go with her now.* Ginnie sighed and shuddered with the last remnants of laughter and allowed Amanda to put an arm around her. She had resigned herself to the comfort of being looked after in what her mind had already begun to call "the old-fashioned way."

* * *

In three years the rain had washed most of the whitewash away. There was only the barest outline left now. Ginnie traced it with her fingers. It was getting cold. She must go and see if David had woken up. She walked round the side of David's basement room, trailing her fingers along the wall. He wasn't in there, there was no light in the high-up little window. He was still lying on the bed with his eyes closed. Goodness, he'd been sleeping for hours. The pillow had fallen on the floor, and his face was turned to the window. It looked very sick. Ginnie put her face close to the glass to see better. He was a horrible muddy white color. Well, she had better borrow his boat and go home. Amanda would be worrying about her. Ginnie banged hard on the window. David didn't stir. Then she saw there was something written on the wall by the bed, and cupped her hands round her face to block out the light. Her breath steamed up the glass, but she had already seen, oh my God, on the white wall by the bed neat rows of pencil marks, each group of four being crossed through with a fifth mark in the manner of men who track time in dun-

geons. She drew back as if the glass had suddenly grown slimy and she stood with her arms at her side, helpless with love for the figure on the bed. He must be very lonely. She fished in the pocket of her jeans and found an old shopping list in Amanda's handwriting, and there was a Woolworth's lipstick in her jacket. On the back of the shopping list she wrote WAITED ALL P.M. FOR YOU TO WAKE UP. HAVE TO TAKE YOUR BOAT NOW. SORRY. Ginnie paused, unthinkingly licking the tip of the lipstick as though it was a pencil, then she wrote, I MUST COME BACK, and underlined it. There wasn't room for any more. She squeezed in a cross and a G, and went to look for a stone.

Amanda was curled up on the sofa in a pair of black silk pajamas. "What on earth have you got all over your mouth?" she said. Ginnie rubbed her mouth and looked at the back of her hand. "Lipstick." "Good God." Amanda reached for her drink. "Where have you been anyway?" Ginnie massaged the inside of her wrist against her thigh. She found this very soothing when she was nervous. She said, "Nowhere," and then she said, "No, actually I've been to see David." Nothing. Amanda licked a finger and turned a page of the magazine she was reading. "I wondered if you would tell me," she said, "and for goodness sake stop rubbing your leg like that." Amanda put her drink back on the table and Ginnie watched the silk sleeve fall away from her aunt's freckled arm. "How did you know?" she said. Amanda toyed with a gold charm on her wrist. "Who *told* you?" They were suddenly both very angry, Amanda faded and cold and Ginnie brilliant with heat. "Don't you *dare* raise your voice to me, young lady! You've been very naughty and you know it." "I only went to see my *brother*. Golly, I don't see that that's such a crime. And I told you about it anyway, didn't I?" "You didn't tell me before you went though, did you? Because you knew very well I wouldn't let you go." She changed the tone of her voice, "Don't you have *any* respect for my feelings?" "Oh good Lord!" Ginnie was furious with herself for being very close to tears. "What's so bad about David anyway?" "My dear Ginnie," Amanda was being soft and reasonable now. "I know

he's your brother, but we must face the fact that some people just don't . . . turn out as they should. That's all. David is a very unfortunate boy who was born with a dreadful handicap. It nearly broke your father's heart, you know, when they found out David was deaf. He used to come here and sit in that chair you're sitting in now and pour out his . . . anguish. His disappointment. To me, because your mother was already so upset she couldn't have borne your father's grief as well. Your father was a very wonderful man, Ginnie. In a way I'm glad he didn't live to see what happened to his son in the end." "Oh!" said Ginnie. "Oh, stop talking as though David was a cripple or a maniac or something! He's only deaf." "Only deaf? *Only* deaf? My dear, don't you realize than an affliction like that can be crippling? It can prevent people from growing up into normal . . . human beings. I think it's a great *pity*. I feel very *sorry* for David. But you belong to me now, and I love you far too much to allow you to be contaminated by his twisted concepts of life!" Ginnie said, "I don't belong to you. I don't belong to anybody." "All right, Miss Petulant, you don't *belong* to me, but you could have been my daughter, you know." Suddenly her pale eyes veered away from Ginnie and she reached for her drink again. "I mean, you might just as well be my daughter with the sense of responsibility I have for you. Now! Go and change those muddy shoes and let's hear no more about it." Ginnie swung herself up from the chair, glad to get out of the room. But at the door she stopped and turned. "I didn't really see David. He was asleep all the time I was there. And he's made marks on the wall, like someone in a prison. I think he's awfully sick." Amanda held up her hand. "I said I didn't want to hear any more about David. I hope it's understood you won't go there again. And if he's sick he's quite old enough to go and see a doctor." Ginnie shouted, "You know why you never had any children? Because God didn't think you were fit to have any!"

After all the years of conversation that had soaked into the dark medallioned wallpaper, after all the bodies that had warmed the seats of the armchairs, after all the fires that had

been lighted in the granite fireplace, nothing in the living room had reached saturation point. The wallpaper, the fireplace and the armchairs, which for years now had been piled with books, all of them were cold and silent. The books that overflowed from broken crates and torn brown paper onto the floor, the chairs, the windowsills, the mantelpiece and the top of the cupboard were silent. They had spoken to David. He had read them all. Ginnie poked with the toe of her sandal at the books stacked on the floor, bending her head sideways to read the titles. S. and B. Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation.* Bertrand Russell, *Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy.* G. Orwell, *Animal Farm.* T. E. Shaw, *Translation of the Odyssey of Homer.* A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus.* David Reisman, *The Lonely Crowd.* Ginnie twined her fingers in her long red hair. It had perhaps been a great sorrow to David that she had never wanted to read any of this. She had called it pompous trumpeting. Pompous Trumpeting. A lot of noise. She pushed at the pile of books and sent them sliding to the floor. In the early days at the beginning of her strange new life when she had come back to live with David after a court case of which Ginnie remembered nothing except the moment when David, with his old teacher Calvin Newman as interpreter of hand signs, had told the court that the child that had miscarried Lillian to her death in a ditch had been David's own legitimate child, for he had made Lillian his own and legal wife, marrying Lillian in secret because she had wished it above all things (although she had never said so except with her doe rabbit eyes when she told David she was pregnant). In those strange and early days David's books had been a symbol of Ginnie's new freedom, and she carried them with her to the beach, and even in the streets of the town, to complete her image of a girl who was leading a pleasantly uncivilized, unconventional and enviable life. But as Ginnie grew accustomed to unsupervised meals and clothing, irregular hours and informal schooling at Calvin Newman's these props became unnecessary, and at fifteen when she was asked what she read she replied "Poetry, Rosamund Lehmann and some amusing facts." At sixteen, in Calvin Newman's dusty

front parlor where David had learned to read, Ginnie slammed down her copy of *The Myths of Sisyphus* (startling no one, for if you remember, Calvin Newman was deaf), and declared that she thought philosophy was pompous trumpeting, for as far as she was concerned Man was no more important than a rock or a tree, and therefore it was presumptuous of him to think up reasons for his existence, and to discuss whether he could tolerate it or no, and that her last pretense of admiration for the intellectual had disappeared, flown out the window, as far as she was concerned. And when Calvin Newman smiled and gently pointed out that nowadays it was considered very intellectual to be anti-intellectual she snorted, "Oh for heaven's sake, please give me some French composition or something."

Ginnie stood in the middle of the silent living room feeling that she was surrounded by strangers who remained as baffling and comfortless as they had been in the days when she had sought among them for refuge from strange meals with moldy bread, strange dirt that collected on the unwashed plates and bedsheets. Strange not to have a clean pair of socks to put on. Strange, the hours left all to herself without a sight of anyone to ask what she was doing and if she was warm. Days sometimes without the sight of David. The Ginnie of those years, grown long haired and long limbed now, grown used to filling in unpeopled hours, grown used to managing things with her right hand square, stained and clipped, and with only sudden helpless gestures of the softer left hand to remind her that she was once formless and cried in the night, again felt herself among speechless strangers, with David gone forever.

And yet in those sixteen-year-old years there had been one friend then, one single friend. A book of water birds that she had come upon by chance and taken delighted to her bed and out onto the rocks in the sun, reading the poetry of vagrant Caspian Terns (swimming birds with strong and agile flight) and Pomarine Skuas and Whimbrels and Mute Swans. And this friend had found for her another friend, Timothy, whom she met one day in the High Street when he had been living for four years with his Grandmother Cliquot, and had grown

dark haired and angular from too much religion and a sense of sin. Ginnie had been spending the day at her favorite beach—a five-mile stretch of sand, wide open and burning white. Usually Ginnie travelled on her bicycle but that morning she had found a puncture in the front tire and rather than waste sunshine mending the puncture she had walked into town and caught a bus. The bus service on Island works on a very simple system. The number 1 bus goes to the west coast, the number 2 goes north and the number 3 east. All the routes generate from the Town Bus Station on the south coast and otherwise have no connection with each other whatsoever. Anyone wishing to go by bus from east to west from west to north must go into town and catch another bus out again. But this does not mean that the buses are co-ordinated. One usually has an hour or two to while away between connections. Ginnie had caught her homeward bus on the east coast road at 3:30 P.M. and got into town at five minutes past four to find that the bus that went near the Kingdom House had left at four o'clock. There wasn't another bus until five thirty.

If the sun hadn't been so hot and if Ginnie hadn't spent a long time in the surf she would have shrugged and walked home. But that day it seemed easier to wait for the next bus, and while she waited Ginnie went into a bookshop to see if a book that had been ordered for David had arrived from London. If Ginnie had come out of the bookshop a minute earlier or a minute later Timothy would not have been outside, one foot on his bicycle and one foot on the ground, waiting for the traffic lights to change. Ginnie hadn't seen Timothy since he was four years old, so she wouldn't have recognized him if he hadn't spoken to her. And Timothy would not have noticed Ginnie if she hadn't been carrying a large and beautifully jacketed book of birds which she had picked up while she waited to be served and had found too beautiful to put down. Ginnie came out of the bookshop, feeling very happy and extravagant because she had just had a beautiful book of birds put onto David's account "and don't bother to wrap it please because I have an hour to wait for my bus so I'll read it." The High Street was chock full of traffic and Ginnie wanted to

cross the street to Woolworth's because she needed a hair slide. If she had been in a hurry Ginnie would have squeezed through a gap in the stationary cars but she was in no hurry so she stood on the edge of the pavement and leafed through her book. The photographs caught Timothy's eye as he waited, one foot on his bicycle pedal and one foot on the ground, for the lights to change, and then he saw Ginnie and rang his bell.

They approached each other shyly. Timothy dragged his bicycle out of the stream of traffic that was starting to move. Ginnie was shocked by how much he had grown and by how little he had grown in all those years, both things at the same time. He must be, how old? Nearly eleven. He was small and terrifically bony and his hair was quite dark.

"Hello, Timothy. Goodness. Nice to see you. Goodness, you've grown. I hardly recognized you. I'm glad you recognized me though. How've you been?"

"Fine." Timothy laughed and picked his rubber handle grips. "I'm living with me Granny now." Ginnie nodded and wondered whether to tell him how sorry she was about Lillian's death. But that had been four years ago. It might be awkward to mention it now. She asked him what school he was going to and he told her and she asked him if he liked it. Timothy shrugged. "It's all right. I take my eleven plus next year. I won't pass it though."

"Oh why not? Don't say that. I'm sure you will if you try."

"No, Gran says I don't deserve to pass it."

"Why? Don't you do your school work?"

"Yes. But . . . " Timothy shrugged again.

Timothy said, "That's a nice book you've got there."

"Oh yes. I just bought it. There's some gorgeous photographs in it."

Ginnie brought out the book from under her arms and laid it open on Timothy's handlebars. Timmy's fingers were dirty and he very carefully didn't touch the pages as Ginnie turned

them, but now and again he pointed with a grubby bitten nail to the birds he knew. "Ah yes, ah yes. I know him. I've seen him. I saw one of those over here last winter." Ginnie and Timothy stood with their heads close together in the middle of the High Street and the people passing by would never have guessed that these two had not seen each other for nearly seven years.

Ginnie said, "Would you like to borrow it?" I think it would fit in your saddlebag."

"But you only just got it."

"That's all right. I can read it later."

"Ah no. Granny would want to know where I got it from." Timmy looked at Ginnie with stricken eyes.

Ginnie said, "Of course, I'd forgotten."

Timmy had forgotten too, but now that he remembered his eyes flickered among the passing faces, fearful of seeing one that knew him and would tell his Gran that he had been talking to Ginnie Olivier. Ginnie said quickly, "Well, look. I must be off. But if you want to come and look at the book sometime you know where I live. I'd love you to come sometime if you can manage it. O.K.?"

Timmy nodded and started to edge his bicycle into the traffic.

"Goodbye," said Ginnie.

"Bye," said Timothy.

Ginnie went into Woolworth's and wandered aimlessly between the counters trying to remember what it was she wanted to buy.

Ginnie swept the books from a chair in the silent living room and sat down with a sigh. She had found a friend and she then had lost him, and now when she called for Timothy only a memory came to talk to her. But in this newly empty, strangely silent Kingdom, even a memory of him was precious for its breadth and being. And so Ginnie talked to the memory.

She said, "I never expected you to come, Timothy. That old witch of a grandmother had you really scared. You're still scared of her, and you are scared of everlasting hellfire. She has damaged you beyond repair." Timothy had brought his own hard chair from the chapel at the end of John Le Mason's potato field. It suited his white little posterior. He held an open Bible on his lap as he sat in the middle of the littered floor. From Jeremiah, chapter two, verse twenty-five, he read " 'There is no hope: no, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.' "

Ginnie tucked her legs under and pulled her dress over them. She said, "If you loved us why did you go away? You hurt David terribly you know. Every day he watched for you and I didn't have the courage to tell of the thing that had happened between us on the cliff. But that was foolishness, Timothy. It was *me* you ran away from that day but there was no need for you never to come back. And now it is too late. David has gone and you will not come now for my sake. Did I hurt you so badly?" In the center of the room the ghost of Timothy said, "I am scarred where I touched you," and he held out his left hand. In the small knubbly palm the scar was livid and in some places it had not yet healed. But Ginnie could quite clearly read the name of Judathan.

Ginnie closed her eyes and said, "Yes, yes. I see. I see . . ."

* * *

See Ginnie, who in winter dislikes her legs because they are pale or pinkish blue with purple scorch marks on the long shin bones from sitting too close to the fire, striding on legs that in her twentieth summer are brown and strong, fit to carry her wide hips along a dusty road on a Sunday afternoon in mid July. She sings as she walks and the sun walks with her, a lion on a leash. The road curves behind her and before her through fields of yellow mustard flowers, and where the sky changes color lies the sea.

Presently there is a change in the silence and Ginnie turns and sees a van, a long way off, sending heliograph messages to her from the dents in its green paint. She walks on until the half-

expected car horn startles her from the middle of the road. Then she turns and smiles. The van stops. Ginnie, pressed against the stone wall by a blast of metal heat, feels the bite of stinging nettles on her legs. The driver says something and she has to lean into his cab to listen because it is not easy in this burning afternoon to hear the human voice.

He says she will have to get in the back of the van. There is no seat beside him, just a pile of junk. Ginnie nods and grins. O.K., she says, but he will have to wait a minute while she finds a dock leaf for her nettle stings. O.K., he says, and watches her walk slowly a little way up the road, his eyes on her backside, waiting for her to bend over. Ginnie foils him nicely by going down with her back straight, like a pupil in a dancing class. Her long fingers pick three leaves and she walks back to the van and climbs over the pile of junk into the back.

The van is a builder's van. There is brick dust on the floor, and near the double doors at the back two bags of mortar are being used as seats by two young men. One boy very fair with incredibly high cheekbones and sunken prophetic eyes, the other like a four-foot-high red brick wall. Ginnie nods at them and braces herself with her back and feet. The heated metal strikes through her shirt into her stomach, making her feel slightly sick, and the van lurches on coughing up dust.

The fair boy says, "I am David. This is Goliath," and then he turns to Goliath and says, "You should have hair like her. Red. Pure red. Enough to start an emperor up from his bier to utter cold, bird-chattering cries." And Goliath, whose hair is only ginger, lifts his head and howls out a long heartrending cry that becomes the first note of a bawdy song.

By the time the van stops the dock leaves are shrivelled on the floor of the van and Ginnie has forgotten about the stings on her legs. They have swung into a parking lot and the driver grinds the handbrake to the floor and gets out to open the back doors. Goliath struggles out. A brick-red hand comes in contact with blistering green paint. "Fuck," says Goliath, and David slays him quietly with pebbled eyes. Ginnie slides

along the floor of the van, out onto the asphalt and immediately sits down again lifting her scorched bare feet to put her sandals on. The driver grins at her. Ginnie says, "Thanks for the ride. Can I buy you a drink?" The driver says, "Are you loose?" Ginnie stands up, whumphing brick dust from her behind, "No. I'm waiting for someone." The driver lifts his shoulders. "Thanks anyway," he says, and they all move away towards the thrum thrum thrum of a double bass. The sun roars in from the sea and explodes among the windshields in the car park. They walk through a mirage of puddles to where an enormous iced cake has rotted into the ground leaving its plaster decoration sitting on the hill. El Tapado, the place of buried treasure.

Through the Spanish archway into darkness. Ginnie pushes through a press of many bodies, and voices whisper hello darlin', oh what a darlin', but their faces are only purple and green aftermaths of the sun outside. She finds a table by the window and a waiter, working like fury this afternoon, is on her very fast. She orders a Cinzano and he is back almost before she can fish the change from her pocket. He drops her money onto a wet tin tray and leaves her alone. Ginnie sifts carefully through the crowd of off-duty waiters come to move their feet to a rhythm that pleases them for a change; through the beer-drinking farmers' sons who are quenching the thirst they got from tearing up Sunday afternoon with their motor bikes; through the young beach god lifeguards from Australia and South Africa conversing over the heads of the crowd and keeping an eye on the surf; through the scattered indolent groups of summer drifters who came to Island at the beginning of the season and will leave at the end of it hardly knowing or caring what they have done with the summer. Ginnie sifts through them all one by one, but not one of them looks likely to be the person she is waiting for.

The clockwork jazz band plays on a pedestal. Ginnie sips her drink and watches the lovely blue grass-brown day blowing away outside the window. And then he comes, and sits down beside her.

He is dressed in softest black leather, stretched over his skin as a cat stretches. His black skin under the black skin is faintly tinged with blue and yet he is not so very black because his palms are the color of pale honey, not pink like others she has seen. He wears a small black leather hat tipped so far forward on his shorn lamb's head that she cannot see his eyes. Why this one? she asks herself, why this fancy dresser? There is a girl with him. She carries a large white plastic bag. The girl sits down while she orders her drink, putting the bag on the floor. And then she picks it up again and says she is going to the ladies' room. Judathan, she calls him, Judathan, Judathan, and walks away in her straight striped dress.

Judathan tilts his head back so that Ginnie can see him under the hat and says, "Hello." Then came his eyes shining . . . then came his voice . . . friend of my choice. Ginnie turns her glass round by its stem. "Are you too beautiful to speak to?" Judathan asks. Ginnie looks up, startled. "Oh, I'm sorry. Did you speak to me. I was thinking of something else." He says, "I just said hello." He stammers a little and accents words with his African French. "Hello," says Ginnie. Hello, hello, hello, hello. The waiter comes with two glasses and a jug on a tray. "Pernod." "Here," says Judathan. "Water." Water trickles into the Pernod until Judathan holds up a finger. The finger is quite small and slim and it bends backwards. He uses it to stir the clouded yellow drink to milkiness. "It makes me nervous to sit and drink with a woman I can't speak to," he says. "Yes. It's awkward." Suddenly Ginnie is fed up, tired, disgusted with the game that is starting, that she has never played before and doesn't want to play now. Not yet. Not for a long time yet. She drains her glass in one long swallow and having set it down empty discovers that she doesn't want to go after all. Her hair twists round her fingers and her eyes follow the waiter. "Will you have another?" Judathan asks. Her back drops against the canvas sling-backed chair. "No thank you," she says, and feels silly because he has seen her trying to catch the waiter's eye. "Then have a cigarette," Judathan pulls a packet of Gauloises from his jacket pocket. "Oh, Gauloises. No thank you."

"You don't like Gauloises?"

"Oh I quite like them, but they're . . . you know, rough. And if I have one I'll have to have another drink."

"Then have another drink," Judathan snaps his fingers in the air and the waiter with a loaded tray veers dangerously.

"What is it?" asks Judathan.

"Cinzano, thank you." And it is too late. He has her now, and it is too late. Just as she wanted it to be.

Back from the ladies' comes the girl, smelling of hair spray and carbolic soap, settling herself in front of a tall, two-straw drink. Judathan says, "Sylvia, I'd like you to meet . . . I'm sorry I don't know your name."

"Ginnie."

"Ginnie." He says Geenee.

The girl nods and smiles at Ginnie and swoops down birdlike on her two straws. Ginnie looks at the top of Sylvia's dark, meticulously middle-parted head almost expecting it to lift again like a bird's head, letting the sip of Tom Collins run down inside the pale throat. Sylvia's skin is all pale. The kind of skin that shines in deep shadow. Her elbows on the plastic table top are smooth and round. She is all deep, thick softness, this girl. There is a terrible tenderness here, turning her flint-colored eyes to smoke and aching to reach out and touch Judathan. The waiter comes back with Ginnie's drink, and when Judathan pays for it Sylvia looks at him sadly. Judathan says, "What shall we talk about?" . . . meaningless as wind in dry grass or rat's feet over broken glass. And Ginnie says the first word that comes into her head. "Glass. I don't like glass. It's a pretender. Look at that lot," she lifts her chin towards the window. "It would like to pretend it's not there at all, only the flies keep giving it away." "Ah, no, no, no. It is not a pretender. It is a trickster if you like, it likes to deceive, you see." The words tumble and stammer from Judathan's Creole child mouth and he pushes his hat back with a long curved thumb. "No, I disagree with you, Geenee.

Take mirrors now. I have been concerned with the problem of mirrors for a long time. I mean, what you see in a mirror has to be there. I mean it has to exist. Mirrors cannot make up objects for themselves. And yet, what you see in a mirror is not really there at all." He looks to Ginnie for a reply. Eyes I dare not meet in dreams, more distant and more solemn than . . . than a something star. His eyelashes are long. Ginnie thinks that all this is going to take some getting used to. Sylvia's oval thumbnail cuts a straw into four pieces. She says, "You don't have to tell me about mirrors. There's a supervisor in the salon where I work, who doesn't like me very well, and she stuck me with a wonky mirror for weeks. I mean there was definitely something wrong with it in the middle, you know, just where the customer's face comes, something very funny. My tips dropped right down. People don't like to sit and see themselves all funny, do they?" She puts the four pieces of straw on the table and seems to brood about the fact that they are not all exactly the same length. Judathan's finger goes round and round the rim of his glass. Ginnie says, "Well, suppose that for some reason or another, all mirrors were made with a funny bit in the middle. We'd all take it for granted that we had a bump on the forehead or a crooked nose, wouldn't we?" Judathan puts his finger on his nose and looks at her. "No," she says. "Perhaps not. It was an empty-headed thing to say." She turns to Sylvia, "Do you live on Island, Sylvia?" she asks. Sylvia says, "Oh no. I live in London. This is my holidays. I came over to see Judathan because he's been over here since May, you see. It's a lovely place though, isn't it? Do you live here?" "Yes. I have a house on the other side of the island." She turns to Judathan. "What are you doing over here?" "Oh, I'm in a window in town doing pastel portraits. Dreadful. Good bread though. You should come in one afternoon. I'll do you free. No bumps on the forehead or crooked nose either—ask Sylvia. She shills for me." Ginnie raised her eyebrows. Sylvia said, "He means that when things are slow I sit in the window and he pretends to be doing a drawing of me that he finished days ago. It looks better if he looks busy, you see. I don't mind. It gives us a chance to talk." She looks at Judathan very sadly

and he looks back at her gently and asks if she would like another drink. The eyes are not here . . . There are no eyes here in this valley of dying stars. "Oh my goodness me no," she says, "Not in the middle of the afternoon. I'd be under the table." Judathan raises his eyebrows at Ginnie but she shakes her head. "O.K. then," says Judathan, "let's blow." Sylvia gets up slowly, saying the heat exhausts her. Ginnie can believe it does, seeing Sylvia naked and heavy on a bed, her pale skin glimmering in a shaded room, and then Sylvia picks up her white plastic handbag and the vision is gone.

Ginnie walks behind them across the car park to a white car. Judathan says, "You going back to town?" Ginnie says, "Well, actually, you could drop me off in town, but I was wondering if you would like to come back to my place and have a sandwich or something. Would you like to?" She looks at Sylvia and Sylvia looks at Judathan. Judathan says, "Sounds good. Can you squeeze in the front?" Jammed sideways beside Sylvia, the wind banging in on her ear through the open window, Ginnie drives home. "Turn left here," she says, "next right, keep straight on." Sylvia sits with her hands folded on top of the white bag, watching things go by, saying nothing until they pull in front of Ginnie's Parish Post Office, then says, "Oh, isn't this nice? Look at that sea. It could nearly blind you." Ginnie tells Judathan to park the car on the broken causeway and wait a minute, and then she jumps up the steps into the little shop and buys bread and paté and cheese and beer. "Put it on the book," she says to Miss Labot and jumps down the steps, leaving the doorbell jangling behind her. Judathan and Sylvia are waiting in the road. "Which way do we go?" asks Sylvia. "I hope it isn't far. My feet are killing me." "Take your shoes off then, I would," says Ginnie. "You might get them wet anyway. I think there's water in the bottom of the boat. I live out there." She nods out to the Kingdom House. "Out there!" Sylvia plonks heavily on a bollard and Judathan pushes back his hat. "Here, hold these a minute will you?" She dumps her parcels on Judathan and kneels down, untying and pulling on a painter. A little blue dinghy jerks slowly forward from a mass of little boats,

and Ginnie walks it to an iron-rung ladder. "We're lucky," she says. "Another half an hour and we'd have had to walk. Will you hold the rope, Sylvia, and I'll take the beer down and hold the boat steady, then you can throw me the rope and come down yourself. O.K.? Can you manage?" Ginnie is in the boat holding on the ladder. "All right, Sylvia, throw me the rope. You can throw down your shoes and bag too. It's very easy." Sylvia stares down at Ginnie for a moment and then gathers her skirt and climbs slowly down, backwards. She is a little hesitant about stepping into the rocking boat, but she manages it and sits down in the stern, looking up at Judathan and laughing. Judathan is down the ladder like a cat. He gives the dinghy a shove off and sits down beside Sylvia. Ginnie sits on the middle plank, gears the oars into the rowlocks and, dipping first one oar then the other, steers between the other boats out into open water where she plants her feet firmly one either side of Judathan's sprawing black legs and pulls away strongly. "The tide will be down later. I'll have to bring you back in the jeep," she says.

See Ginnie, almost up to her knees in water, dragging the dinghy nearer the Kingdom beach. Sylvia jumps out after her and paddles ashore carrying the bread. Judathan walks to the prow, balances a moment and then springs to dry sand, holding greaseproof paper packages of cheese and paté in either hand. Ginnie pulls a bit more and then gets the beer out of the boat. "We'll go in through the front door," she says. They trail in through the front door into the hall and Ginnie leads the way through the living room. Sylvia looks at the trailing cobwebs in the high ceiling, the dark damp stains on the medallioned wallpaper, the books scattered over the floor, chairs, windowsills, and she asks if Ginnie lives here all by herself.

"No, I have a brother, but he has a room downstairs. I don't suppose he'll even know we're here unless he sees the boat's back. It's a mess, isn't it? But we don't notice it. Mind the step." Sylvia says, "It's nice and cool in here anyway, isn't it?" Judathan is trailing somewhere behind, looking at books and the odd antiques. Ginnie and Sylvia come to the kitchen. It is full of late afternoon sunlight. Ginnie opens the door onto

the lawn and lets in a smell of green leaves and seaweed. Sylvia puts the bread down on the table. She says, "I've seen a lot of dance halls smaller than this. It's nice though, isn't it? You should see my kitchen. Just about big enough for me and a saucepan. Judathan, don't you love this kitchen?" Judathan stands on the kitchen step. He closes one eye and makes a sweeping gesture with outstretched arms and widespread fingers. "Lady," he says, "how would you like a mural on that wall?"

But the mural comes later. This evening the three of them sit round the kitchen table, playing with crumbs of French bread while they talk, until it is nearly dark. Then Ginnie says, "I'll have to take you back now, I don't really like driving across when it's dark. You can't see the big stones." She leads them outside and Judathan helps her with the garage doors while Sylvia stands a little distance away, barefoot and dreaming. Judathan says, "May I come back sometime by myself?" Ginnie says, "Not until Sylvia has gone."

The telephone rings. Ginnie is sitting on the lawn shelling peas. She upsets the colander with her foot, runs through the kitchen still holding a pea pod, along the L-shaped passage into the living room. "Hello?"

"Hello, Geenee. Did you have a hard time finding the phone under all those books?"

"Yes, sort of. Who's this? Judathan?"

"You didn't come in to have your portrait done."

"Oh no. How are you? How's Sylvia?"

"She's fine. She's gone back to London. Three days ago."

"Oh. Did she have a nice holiday?"

"I think so. Only it was so hot, you know?"

"Yes."

"Were you expecting me to call?"

"Oh. I don't know. Yes, I suppose so. No, not really."

A short silence.

"Would you come out with me tonight, Geenee?"

"Oh golly. Where to?"

"Dancing somewhere."

"*I* can't dance."

"It's not hard. It won't be for you."

"Well, what time about? Wait a minute. I have to think what the tide is doing. I hope you're not expecting me to be fancy. I don't have anything to wear."

Judathan says something Ginnie can't catch.

"What did you say? I'm sorry, could you speak more slowly?"

"I said a beautiful girl like you doesn't have to worry what she wears."

"Oh I don't worry. It was your feelings I was thinking about. Look, the tide will be all right for me to drive over anytime after seven. Where shall I meet you?"

"I'll be waiting for you by that . . . you know that broken-down wall thing, at half past seven."

"The causeway, you mean? That's a causeway. It belongs to the house."

"O.K. I'll meet you by your broken-down causeway. Bye."

"Bye . . . Look, Judathan . . ." But she was holding an empty receiver.

See Ginnie in a pale green dress being met by a man from Mauritius. He greets her with a handshake, thinking that the color of her dress is too delicate to hold all her burning copper. They have a short argument because Ginnie wants to follow behind him in the jeep, then they get into his car. The radio comes on very loud when he starts up the engine. Ginnie

switches it off. Judathan switches it on and without taking his eyes off the road catches both her wrists in a surprisingly rough grip and holds them there. She protests, saying, "That ain't no way to treat a lady." "Do you so very much want to be a lady?" he asks. "No," she says. He asks her to light a cigarette for him. She lights one, and gives it to him, and watches him put it in his mouth.

First they go to a bar, then to a restaurant where the waiter is Judathan's cousin, then he takes her dancing.

It is a dark place. Deep blue and dark red lights light the dance floor and the band. Judathan knows the bongo player. They are shown to a tiny table and Judathan orders drinks, his curved hands beating a soft rhythm on the table top. As soon as the waitress walks away he is up and wanting to dance. "Come," he says. "Come and dance." He leads Ginnie across the floor to a corner where the tables are empty and there he stands for a moment, letting her watch the rhythm of his body and his tiny, gentle steps. "Move," he says. "Listen to it. Move." "Oh, Judathan, I *can't!*" "Oh yes you can, baby." Still careful not to lose her, he allows himself one controlled eruption of intricate movements then he takes her in his arms, restricting himself to her body, working and working it until it is supple and moving with him. "Oh yes," he says. "Oh yes." Ginnie has closed her eyes because what she sees beyond his shoulder no longer makes any sense. Her breath keeps getting tangled in her throat so that she has to swallow hard. Then suddenly, cruelly, Judathan breaks away, flashing his grin, striking out on his own, but the bongo player keeps a hold on her, plucking the beat from her stomach, making her itch to move all over and shout. She turns her back on Judathan, letting her hips tell him a thing or two, and then she dances purely for herself until the music stops and the bongo man gives her back her body. People on the floor clap and drift away. Judathan says, "Where were you?" he claps her on the back as though they had just finished a friendly tennis match. "Excuse me, but I have to go and find a lady who said she couldn't dance."

Ginnie smiles, rather self-conscious, and pushes the hair back from her wet forehead. "Boy, do I need something cool to drink," she says.

See Ginnie getting out of a white car in front of Labot's Parish Post Office and Shop. She runs to the edge of the quay and looks over at the black water. "It's covered," she says and goes down the iron-rung ladder and puts her leg down into the water to see how deep the water is. "I'll have to wait a few minutes yet. I can still touch the bottom." She climbs back up and Judathan offers her a cigarette and lights it for her. They lean against the car and blow smoke at the stars.

Judathan says, "There's no light over there." "No, there wouldn't be. Not one that you can see anyway. If David is still awake he will be down in his basement room."

"Does he ever come up from his room?"

"Yes, of course he does."

"Don't you get lonely?"

"No. Why?"

"It's a big empty house a long way from anything."

"It might seem peculiar to you, but it's not really. I mean, it isn't to me. I'm used to it. I rather love it actually."

"Isn't your brother deaf?"

"Yes. But if you think that makes any difference to him as a person, you're absolutely wrong. Of course you haven't met him have you? Well, if you had met him you'd know. At least, it might very well have made him different from what he would have been if he wasn't deaf, but it's a better sort of difference, I think. David and I communicate very well. What are you laughing at?"

"I'm not laughing. I was just smiling. The way you speak amuses me. You are so very serious about things, aren't you, Geenee?"

"Oh, I don't think I am. Perhaps so. Well, when one spends a great deal of time alone . . . I don't know, I mean you can't go round laughing like a maniac to yourself, can you?"

"There you are, you see. You've just admitted that you spend a lot of time alone."

"Well, that doesn't mean I'm lonely, you clot. It's not the same at all. Don't you like to be by yourself?"

"Yes, but because I choose to."

"Well, *I* choose to. I don't *have* to live out there with my brother if I don't want to. You know, after my mother died I went to live with my aunt. I mean I was going away to school in England, but I was virtually her daughter for a while—and I absolutely couldn't stand it. Well no, that's not quite true, but I was unhappy. I must have wanted to come back pretty badly, otherwise I couldn't have stuck out all the nastiness there was. She was terribly upset, and there were rows and things, and a court case. David got the worst of the mess. I was only about thirteen or fourteen at the time, but it was me who started it all. Poor Aunt Amanda. I feel rather badly about her actually. She's an absolute wreck now. I'm not sure it was all due to me, I mean she was neurotic as anything to start with, but there was something pretty nasty dragged out of the woodshed in court and it broke up her marriage—which wasn't all honey and roses anyway—but I mean the whole point is I put all kinds of people through hell, just to get back there. So don't feel sorry for me."

"I won't ever feel sorry for you, and I won't ever touch that sore spot again."

"It's *not* a sore spot."

"All right, all right. Did you have a nice time tonight?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, I did. I had a lovely time. Thank you *very* much, Judathan. I'd better be getting back now. I think the tide's covered enough."

"What will you do about the jeep?"

"Oh, I'll just leave it on the causeway and come back for it in the morning. It'll be perfectly all right."

"What happened to your causeway, by the way? What's that hole in the middle?"

"Oh, David blew it up after mother died, just after the funeral cortege passed over it actually. Will you cast off for me and throw the painter down?"

"Nice fella."

"Now don't start that again."

"Oh, I'm probably just jealous."

"Don't be ridiculous. Goodnight." Ginnie climbs down the ladder and gets into the boat.

Judathan looks down at her and says, "I didn't get a goodnight kiss."

"Well, I just learned to dance, didn't I? I can't cope with too many new things in one evening. Throw me the rope please."

"Have you never kissed anyone before?"

"Never. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Geenee."

Judathan stands on the quay listening to the creak of her oars.

See Ginnie lying on the beach of the Kingdom House. She has just come out of the sea. She glistens and her hair is dark with wet. Judathan lies beside her, wearing all his clothes in the hot sun. Ginnie says, "Why don't you go for a swim, Judathan? The water's glorious."

"I don't like to swim in the sea."

"How funny. Well, why don't you take your jacket off, for heaven's sake? You must be boiling."

"No."

"Poor Judathan. You really are very conventional, you know. It's bothering you terribly that I don't have a swimsuit on, isn't it?"

"Geenee, you are such a little girl sometimes."

"Well, then it shouldn't bother you that I have nothing on, if I'm such a little girl. Little girls run naked on the beach all the time."

"Do you go round like that in front of your brother?"

"Yes, of course. Well, I swim and lie on the beach like this. If he's there he doesn't take any notice. What did you think? Did you think that he's panting to commit incest, or something like that?"

"You have no shame, woman."

"Oh, Judathan, don't be old-fashioned, it doesn't go with your outfit. You must have seen a lot of women without any clothes on, haven't you? Well, haven't you?"

"Yes, but they weren't prick teasers like you. They didn't expect me to just look."

"Well then, why can't you just enjoy looking at me for a change, and I'll enjoy being looked at. Why can't it be like that?"

"Because, you bitch, I haven't touched you yet. If I was . . . if I was your lover I could maybe see you lying around like that without tearing my guts out. But the way things are you shouldn't do it."

"Yes, but it wouldn't be the same then. I wouldn't want you to look at me without desire. I like to think of there being a sort of bursting in your loins to get at me."

"Oh God, I can't *stand* women who get their kicks that way."

A short obstinate silence. Then Ginnie says, "You can kiss me if you like."

An explosive noise from Judathan. He says, "I ought to rape you right here and now."

"Yes, perhaps you should. I'm sorry. I've made you really angry. But you shouldn't mind that I tease you a little. It's such a little while that I've got to enjoy this narrow, steely sort of power. Some women have it all their lives, but I know that as soon as I'm not a virgin anymore I'll never be able to be what you said I was just now. I'm too, what you m'call it, *basic*. I'm an animal, or at least I'm very animal-like, as my brother has found out to his sorrow. And don't look like that. I only mean that he hoped I'd turn out to be a little more intellectual—but I ask you—did you ever hear of an intellectual having thighs like mine? So do you please forgive me? Look, to show how sorry I am I'll even put some clothes on."

"And how long did you intend to remain in this virginal state?"

"Oh, I was waiting for some very *gallant* knight to come along and catch my trophy on his fearless lance."

"And do any of the knights in your country have black skin, Geenee?"

"Oh, one of them does."

"Do you intend him to take your favor?"

"Well, if he doesn't someone else will."

"Then?"

"Then it might as well be you. Come on in now, the sun's gone. I'll make some tea. Are you going to do any more to the mural today?"

And so the name of Judathan became imprinted on Timothy's left hand, as Ginnie and Judathan walked back into the Kingdom House kitchen with a pact between them. There was yet no outward sign of a covenant. Ginnie's movements were still self-contained and negligent and Judathan still suffered them, but the scent of complicity was there somewhere in the air because when Timothy walked into the kitchen he was hit by

the peculiar impression that this time he should have knocked. "Hello, Timothy." Ginnie got up from the table to greet him, and somehow this was proof that things were not as they used to be. "You know Judathan, don't you? Come and sit down. I haven't seen you for ages. Would you like some coffee?" Oh yes, now he was certain of it and the taste was bitter. "You know I don't like coffee," he said and hunched all fifteen years of his growth onto a stool. To forget so many thermos flasks of tea was unforgivable, and Ginnie knew it. "I'm sorry." She was truly sorry. "I'll make you some tea." Timothy shook his head. "Lemonade?" Timothy shook his head. Ginnie sighed. "What have you been doing?" Timothy shrugged his shoulders and would not take his eyes off Judathan who was at the top of a step ladder, working on the mural. Ginnie said, "Do you like it?" Timothy raised his eyebrows and nodded. He thought it was dreadful. He looked across at Ginnie. Why did she want so much violent, jungly color in her kitchen? "What is it?" he asked. "It is the sun being eaten by the moon," she said. Timothy raised his shoulders and eyebrows together. "Meaning the triumph of woman over man." Ginnie laughed unkindly. "Don't blame Judathan. I chose it." No, he did not know her as she was now. He had come to tell her of someone who had captured a peregrine falcon and was training it. He would not tell her now. She must pay with something. He stood up, swinging the stool from between his legs and putting it carefully under the table. "Oh, are you going so soon?" Ginnie was pleading with him not to be hurt. "Oh, don't go yet, eh?" But she must pay with something. He stuck his hands in the pockets of his jeans and jerked his head toward the sea.

"Tide," he said and nodded stiffly at Judathan. Ginnie followed behind him to where his boat was tied. "When are you coming again?" she asked.

"You're pretty busy, eh?" he said and untied the painter. Ginnie fished out a packet of cigarettes. "Oh for Christ's sake," she said. Timothy grinned. "Ah, but you'd better not let my granny hear you talking like that, or she won't let me play with you." And he shoved off and in a little while was

gone, taking with him the name of Judathan whose skin was black as sin.

And Ginnie thought—but sin is not always black, Timothy. And sin is not always sin, only when you let it scar you. If you could see it all, Timothy, you would see that the name of Judathan is not black but green. Green like a willow, and Ginnie was blue. Judathan has brought Ginnie to a strange place that she never knew of before. A boat house. A shed built over water so that there is water where there should be a floor. And the shed has great double doors that you can swim under to the sunlight outside. But in here there is a strange water darkness that turns Judathan to willow and Virginia to deep blue. How Sylvia must have shone in this darkness, but she will not ask if he brought her here. This is not the time for honesty. For what willow green Judathan has to do he will need duplicity. How cold the water is. They laugh and plunge together but Judathan is out before Ginnie and stands above her. He is shivering too. Can't we go out into the sun? But no, it must be here in the colored darkness. Oh, Judathan's fingernail is sharp. Or is it just that she's too tight. In spite of her big body she has a tight little tunnel of fire and he hurt her. How strange this kissing is. Not like the kisses he had given her before. She thought, You're choking me. Isn't this enough? But I cannot twist away from underneath you. Yes, I can feel you, but you bring me no joy. You are too frantic and you will not speak as though you know me. I do not love you, Judathan, not as I did when first you danced with me. Oh will you never stop? But there is something. I feel it beginning. I won't think any more. I'll just . . . I'll just . . . but you must not stop now. Oh why have you stopped? Is that all? Is this what it is? You, collapsed upon me, shuddering, and I, filled suddenly with tenderness kissing your ear? But somebody comes to Ginnie's aid. A bemused and practical voice whispers in words of black print, ". . . the physical processes of the deflowering of virginity are much the same for the Isadora Duncans of the world as the brides of Methodist ministers."

Ginnie sighed and said to Timothy, "Let me see what other damage I have done." Timothy held up his right hand. The

scar on his palm was not so deep, but it had festered and Ginnie had to look closely before she could spell out the letters of a name. Bertram. Bertram? Bertram? Bertram's Summer Delight Music Hall. *That* Bertram? Yes, Mr. Bertram with a moustache. Mr. Bertram, the bright raven, standing in the foyer of the Opera House, rubbing his hands and looking strange in dinner dress in the middle of the afternoon. Ginnie is talking to him, and what is *she* wearing? A gay nineties costume, cut very low in front, and her legs are covered in black fishnet stockings. She is an usherette in Bertram's Summer Delight Music Hall, laced into a gay nineties costume. Laced back or front? Laced back *and* front, lighting the way down the aisles with a flash of sequins and selling programs with her front cut so low that the matinee customers call her back and buy another shilling's worth. Timothy makes himself very small in his seat and even Ginnie doesn't see that he is there. Then Mr. Bertram comes down the aisle and sticks a long pink feather in Ginnie's hair, and she laughs, they both laugh, and Ginnie smiles at everyone, but especially at Mr. Bertram. Suddenly the lights go down and Ginnie, a flash of gold and purple in the dark orchestra pit, crashes the cymbals to announce her own ascension in an unearthly green glow seated at the Hammond Organ. Then the curtains drag apart and Ginnie, one behind herself on a long line of kicking fishnet and feathers, sings a naughty song while Mr. Bertram, at the back of the theater, twiddles his moustache.

And after the interval, when Ginnie has sold the ice creams on her tray and counted up her shillings worths, see Ginnie go into a cubbyhole behind a glass panelled door that says in black letters MR BERTRAM. "Mr. Bertram," says Ginnie as she tickles his nose with her feather. "Mr. Bertram," she says as he slips a black strap from her gold shoulder. "Mr. Bertram," as he unlaces what has been laced up and gets caught in her fishnets. And then Ginnie, spread across the desk, her head beside the inkwell, is silent until the lights go up in the theater and it's time to empty the ashtrays, and for Timothy to go home to his tea.

Ginnie lit a cigarette and watched the smoke curl up and hang on the ceiling. One day she must take a broom and get those cobwebs down. "Is there any more?" she said.

Timothy said, "There is one more."

"And where is it?"

Timothy looked down at his lap. "It's under my Bible," he said.

This one would never heal, for it had come from inside Ginnie. Ginnie knew it and bit her tongue. "I am trying hard not to be cowardly enough to wish it had never happened. I do not believe in shame. I will not let it spoil all the space and light and solitude you gave me in exchange for climbing up and down cliffs to look at your birds' nests and lying cramped and silent for hours in your hides, waiting for birds that didn't come. It was with you, Timothy, that I heard the Mute Swans singing in an eggshell sky at dawn, and felt a sharp regret that David would never hear the noise that swans' wings make. Then we drank our thermos full of tea and cycled home in the sunrise. I will not let that be spoiled because I would not protect against something we both wanted. We had been touching as if by accident for a long time. We touched and pretended not to notice, but it doesn't matter what we were pretending. Lies usually have long beginnings and it would be a lie if we said that that afternoon was the first time, when we were lying close together, we wanted to touch each other," she said.

They had gone to see a buzzard's nest on the north cliffs. It was a difficult nest to reach and Ginnie had allowed Timothy to help her because he was sixteen and proud of his new strength. The April sun was hot if you sheltered from the wind, and after they had seen the nest they found a place among the gorse and lay down and let the honeyed smell of gorse roll over them. The wild bees were loud and heavy as bombers and they heard a lark's song but could not see where she was rising. Ginnie felt that her body had just flowered out of the damp earth and that her mind would burst and go flying

and singing straight up into the sky. She teased her mouth with a grass stem and said, "If I could be a bird, I'd be a skylark."

Timothy said, "I think you'd be a seagull."

"Do you? Why?"

Timothy shrugged.

Ginnie said, "But seagulls have cruel beaks and cruel eyes." She propped herself on one elbow and lifted the arm that was shading Timothy's eyes. "Do I have cruel eyes and a cruel mouth?" She made him look at her. "Yes," he said, and Ginnie lay back, satisfied. Timothy started to feel troubled. Usually when he felt this way he left Ginnie and went off on his own until the trouble had left him. But today the sun pinned him to the ground and the yellow gorse enclosed him in a magic circle that he hadn't the will to break, even when his stomach churned into butter and his heart started pounding in his fingertips. He began to pray, "Lord preserve me. Lord preserve me," but Ginnie moved her body slowly, making herself more comfortable on the grass and the Lord didn't help. Timothy sat up but his legs hadn't the sense to get him up and carry him away. The wind moved all around them and sparks of white sunlight fell on the sea but in their place among the gorse it was hot and still. An ant crawled over the toe of Ginnie's canvas shoe. Something pricked Timothy's back and he jumped. Ginnie laughed and pricked him again, quite hard, with a gorse prickle. Timothy caught her wrist and forced her arm back until Ginnie pricked herself. She winced and laughed and fought Timothy until he held her down with both hands. Then she went limp and Timothy found himself lying half on top of her softly heaving body. For an awkward moment Timothy did nothing but stare into her face. Ginnie almost expected him to scratch his head while he thought about his dilemma. But then Timothy quickly closed his eyes and kissed her. He started to tremble violently, and as Ginnie put her arms around him she knew that in this moment she had lost her innocence.

All that Timothy saw and felt might have been part of another molten liquid dream. But just as the dream reached unbearable hot white sweetness Ginnie shattered it with a name. She cried out, "David!"

Timothy lay rigid with shock. He wanted to vomit on her face. He took his cold, shrivelled body from her and did up his trousers, just as though she wasn't there. Then without seeing the proper path through the gorse Timothy plunged into the vicious bushes. He felt nothing and when Ginnie called after him he did not hear. He found a road and walked along it on wooden legs, leaving his bicycle lying beside Ginnie's on the cliff.

The ghost of Timothy Cliquot faded from the room. For a long while Ginnie sat without moving then she glanced at her watch. Thank goodness it was nearly lunch time. Abruptly she got up and went into the kitchen where she got out a wooden board and a stick of celery and started to chop up the silence with a knife.

* * *

My dear Ginnie:
We are moving into the afternoon. At twelve thirty a steward brought in two bowls of pea soup on a silver tray and I was sick. At twelve thirty-five my Friendly Doctor left me and locked the cabin door behind him, so at last I have room to think without bumping into the ghastly curve of pinstripes over his womanish thighs. I lie here in decent solitude: the only freedom. And yet of course I am not free, for the fingers of my left hand unthinkingly act out the habit of fondling my Stone which has been taken away in Doctor Policeman's pocket. The members of my body remember that for many years I have sustained myself with two perfect right angles imprisoned in a piece of quartz. And by this absent groping of my left hand for the conclusive symbol of logic that existed in rocks and minerals before the mind of man was born, I am betrayed. I have been comforting myself with the thought that the consciousness, which must always have been present in matter because in the course of evolution it emerged from it, is a logical consciousness. I have said to myself that man must

have, somewhere within him, an inherited germ of that consciousness which has been pushed down and placed on one side by the habits we acquired with the skill of keeping alive. It has pleased me to speculate that as surely as logic has been identified with the furnace of the sun man will one day allow the germ to grow within him, until at last he fuses with the pure white light of reason. Yet as soon as I remove my command over my fingers the groping in the blind dark of my pocket begins again and I remember that Huitzilopchtli, the sun god, was caused to say, "My principal purpose in coming and my vocation is war . . ." And I remember that when the gods gathered Teotiluacan to create a new sun, two of them burnt themselves and the sun and the moon arose from the fire. But the sun clung to the edge of the world, refusing to move unless the other gods were sacrificed to him. Venus, perhaps foreseeing the agony of thousands of still quivering hearts that in the coming religion would be held up to him, took an arrow and shot at the sun. But he caught and killed her with it and one by one all the other stars, until not one remained alive. It is out of habit that man taints the worship of reason with the lust for blood. I remember how annoyed you were by your habit of picking up the telephone after the wires had been cut. It was very strong, this habit, and you not only picked up the receiver but put it to your ear, perplexed by its emptiness until your eye travelled down and saw the wire which you had cut the morning I showed you the letters.

We were having breakfast, I remember, and you licked the marmalade off your fingers and picked up the letters delicately, as though they were a bunch of thistles. This unconscious daintiness amused me because as you read the first letter—I believe it was from the Foundation to Aid the Exceptional Child—I noticed one of your pencils lying in a plate of uncooked fish cakes.

Dear Mr. Olivier:

Thank you for your letter—dum-te-dum.

We should like to express our interest in your very generous proposal . . .

I watched your eyes travelling down the page, changing their expression, and I noted the low, contented inward note that you had been emitting since you lost your virginity suddenly shot up goodness knows how many decibels in pitch.

> Of course we have no way of knowing whether your property would be suitable for our purposes . . . we propose sending a member of our Board of Trustees whenever it suits your convenience . . .

You looked up, once, as you put the first letter down and picked up the second, from the Society to Aid Distressed Gentlewomen.

> Dear Mr. Olivier,
> We are overcome, we are overwhelmed that you should consider us as possible beneficiaries of your most generous gift of property . . .

From the St. Invictus Homes for the Mentally Handicapped.

> Dear Mr. Olivier,
> Your letter of the 21st February might well be the answer to our prayers. We are desperately in need of new premises to house . . .

Your eyes said, "What is this, a joke?" but your note had taken on definite overtones of panic and since I did not in the least reply to your unspoken question you jumped up and searched desperately among a mess of lettuce leaves on the draining board. And when you had found the kitchen scissors you ran into the living room and cut short all future conversations I might have with the authors of those unspeakable letters. The telephone was the first death in the blossoming war, and I believe it made you feel a little foolish. But your inward note was up like a shield before you, giving you the advantage of many disguises, and when you came back to your place at the breakfast table to make your apologies there was a mother tiger of fierce caution behind your eyes. I might have known then that I had lost. The Indians have a phrase for it: One tiger to a hill.

It was on that same morning you first exhibited impatience of my deafness. Or perhaps it was accumulated resentment of the advantage I have had in writing down my thoughts and arguments, for when very ordinary thoughts are martialled onto paper they take on a form, an order, that does not appear in ordinary conversation. The disadvantage is that written thoughts cannot be transmitted willy-nilly to the person to whom they are addressed. The person must be willing to read them. And that morning when I picked up my pen to explain that this taking away of the Kingdom was my last gift which would make you—I suppose I mean force you to be—completely independent. It was my intention to remove from you the temptation of having a taken-for-granted place to return to, to hide in. I wanted to make you homeless—a condition I hoped you had been prepared to accept. When I took up the pen to write these things you snatched the paper from in front of me and said, "Oh for God's sake! Why can't we ever have a conversation, like *normal* people?" Ah yes. You were angry with disbelief and I was glad of this, for at least I had broken the good bread of your temper. And as the days passed without any alteration in my resolution that which was newly broken hardened and turned a little sour.

You were always very fair, and so was I. When I asked you to post my subsequent letters to the F.A.E.C., the S.A.D.G. and St. Invictus, I told you that they were letters suggesting dates for interviews, not withdrawing my proposal. It was raining that morning and you were away an unusually long time. I thought it might be because of the rain, but when you came back, drenched through, you told me as you towelled your sopping wet hair that you had given the letters to a solicitor instead of the postmistress. And then, thoughtfully, you saved me the trouble of writing the letters again by saying, "It's no use writing any more letters, David, because the solicitor thinks he has very good grounds on which to prove you are unfit to administer your property."

It was very fair of you to warn me when three men, handpicked by the solicitor, came to talk to me. And I answered

their questions fairly, as though I did not know they had come to test my sanity. Three men knocked at the front door and you let them in, and led them through the hopeless clutter of the living room with a candle because a March gale had caused a blackout. They came into the kitchen and I stood up. We shook hands all round, but the only hand I recognized was Calvin Newman, my friend and teacher, who had come to play translator as well as inquisitor. One man was a farmer whom I knew of because he had got himself into politics. He was a Methodist. The other man I did not know at all. We four sat around the kitchen table. You brought us beer and peanuts and then sat with your hands clasped just outside the circle of light. Your face was straining with the agony of willing me to be careful.

Calvin told the men that they could address their questions directly to me as I was able to read lips very fluently, but that I would reply in sign language which he would translate. The men nodded. The one I did not know fiddled with his beer glass and the farmer asked me how I was feeling. I said fine. They were having some trouble in getting started. Calvin asked me if I knew the reason for the visit and the man I did not know shot him an angry look. I think they did not like each other very well. I answered that I knew why they had come, but that the celebrants do not try to trick the priest when there was a ritual murder to be done. Calvin translated this as: He knows, but he will be as honest as he can.

The man thumped his beer glass on the table with the air of someone who has just seen irreparable damage done by a bungling fool. He asked: Why have you decided to give your house away? You realize of course that you will be leaving your sister destitute?

Answer: My sister will be homeless, which is quite different from being destitute. Unless you are talking of emotional destitution, which is something I hope she has been prepared against. Unfortunately Ginnie has a guaranteed income. She will never starve.

Calvin Newman stared at my hands and translated faithfully.

Farmer asks: You say unfortunately. You think that guaranteed income is a bad thing?

Answer: A very bad thing. I would take that away from her if I could.

Calvin: What of your own income, David? Will you give that up?

Answer: It doesn't matter any more what happens to me. It makes very little difference whether I have an income or get a job as a washer-up.

Man: Don't you think you are being a little unrealistic?

Answer: Perhaps it might seem so to you. But my needs are obviously very different from yours. I don't think you could ever be happy wearing scarlet trousers.

Calvin was inclined to censor this last remark in order to avoid confusion. But I insisted and the farmer and the man exchanged glances and settled their lips smugly in the manner of people who are at last getting to the bottom of things. Then they turned their heads towards you, Ginnie, and though you were too much in twilight for me to see your lips I guessed that you were explaining that the remark was owed to something D. H. Lawrence wrote just before he died. "If the men wore scarlet trousers they wouldn't think so much of money; if they could dance and hop and skip, and sing and swagger and be handsome they could do it with very little cash."

The men turned back to me. Calvin Newman was crunching peanuts with his fine horse's teeth.

Man: You still haven't told us why you want to *give* the house away.

Answer: As opposed to selling it?

Man: Yes, if you like.

Answer: If I wanted to sell it you wouldn't be here, would you?

Man: I suppose not.

Answer: That is sufficient reason.

Farmer: Do you consider yourself a, what-do-you-call-it, philanthropist?

Answer: No.

Farmer: Two of your letters were addressed to places that care for the, ah, the mentally handicapped.

Answer: And one was to a home for distressed gentlewomen. I was going to choose the one that could guarantee that the place would be filled up with people who would make it impossible for Ginnie to live here.

Calvin: Why, David?

Answer: I want to make her totally independent. I want to remove from her the temptation of having a taken-for-granted place to run to, to hide in. I want to make her homeless, a condition I hope she has been conditioned to accept.

Man: Conditioned by you?

Answer: In a way.

Man: In what way?

Answer: I have hoped to knock all the props out from under her. But perhaps she was given to me too late, after all. She was already nearly ten years old.

Farmer: She was older, if I remember from the court case. Nearly sixteen.

Man: You find it difficult to keep track of time, Mr. Olivier?

Answer: My sister was nine years old when our mother died, and that was when she was given to me.

Farmer: She went to live with your mother's sister.

Answer: That did not matter. Ginnie already had chosen me then. She came back to me.

Man: Who gave your sister to you, Mr. Olivier?

Answer: My mother.

Man: Before she died?

Answer: After.

Farmer: You talked to your mother, did you?

Answer: No, I wrote her a letter.

Calvin balked a little at this one. That is to say he stopped sucking bits of peanut from between his teeth and looked stubborn. But he knew I could write down anything he refused to translate or, worse, try to say it in my fashion, and shatter my perfectly human face with effort. He repeated what my fingers had spelled out: No, I wrote her a letter.

A disturbance broke out in her half-dark corner, and the men turned to listen to Ginnie. Luckily the cutlery drawer was on my side of the table. I took out a cooking spoon and banged on the table to show that I wouldn't put up with well-meaning interruptions.

Man: And did your mother write back?

Answer: She replied, yes.

Farmer: What did she say?

Answer: She said, "Show her the rim of the tub."

I had to bang on the table again. You were over-anxious, Ginnie, and I had a good mind to ask you to leave the room. You lit a cigarette to steady your nerves and the smoke curled round the hurricane lamp.

Man: Do you often write to dead people?

Answer: Only to my friends.

Man: Do you find it profitable, writing to dead people?

Answer: Yes. They are in a very receptive state.

Farmer: Do you believe in heaven?

Answer: No.

Farmer: Do you believe in God?

Answer: No.

Farmer: Ah, you're a what do you call it, atheist?

Answer: Yes.

Farmer: You once drew a nasty picture of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I heard.

Answer: I depicted Christ as a man, yes.

Man: Was this part of the conditioning process of your sister?

Answer: It was a way of presenting her with a new idea.

Farmer: From what I've heard it was shocking. You considered that suitable for a child?

Answer: Ginnie showed no sign of having a smutty mind.

Farmer: So you wanted to give her one?

Answer: A shrug.

I was beginning to get bored. Or perhaps it was just tiredness. It had been a long time since I had such lengthy contact with strangers.

Man: Was religion one of the props you spoke of?

Answer: Yes.

Farmer: You blew the causeway up at the same time didn't you?

Answer: Purely for my own convenience. I wanted to make it difficult for people to come here.

Man: Are you a Communist, Mr. Olivier?

Calvin and I both yawned. Calvin said, "We mustn't wear out our welcome, gentlemen."

The man said, "One last question. You know that the solicitor hopes to prove to the Royal Court that you are unfit to handle

your property. If he succeeds the house will not be yours to give away. What will you do then?"

I said, "I suppose I shall have to set fire to it."

The three men got into their boat and went home to their beds. Two of them fell asleep with no trouble at all. The third one, who had known me for a long time, paced up and down his bedroom until his wife threw a pillow at him and then he went down into the kitchen where he ate half a packet of cornflakes and came to a difficult decision.

After you had shown them out you came back and stood in the kitchen doorway. I could see so little of you that if it were not for the odd, jerky movements of your candle I could not have said that you were crying. Then you came close and thrust your wet, dissembled face close to mine and said, "You are a pompous, pig-headed, arrogant ass!" That night you took your anger and your candle upstairs to a cold, unaired bed, and never slept in Lillian's laundry room again. This too, in its sad way, was my victory.

* * *

Ginnie was stretched out on the beach below the Kingdom House. Her right hand scooped sand and spilled it. She thought she really ought to write to David and get it posted right away so that he would not feel so lonely during his first days in that place he had gone to. And her mind actually went into the house to look for writng paper and a pen and sat down at the kitchen table and wrote:

Dear David:
This has been a terrible day, and I'm glad that most of it is over. I have not yet really begun to believe that you have gone, and strangely it was Timothy that I felt a great yearning loneliness for this morning. I cannot begin to imagine the place you have gone to, but I'm sure it must be dreadful. And I cannot help being angry with you because there would have been no need for you to go away at all if you hadn't insisted so stubbornly on madness. And I am angry with myself, for here I am left alone with this great empty shell of a house that

I could not let you give away, and now, after all, I find I do not need it . . .

Ginnie's body was still stretched on the beach and her right hand scooped up sand and spilled it. She looked over her shoulder at the ruined causeway and wondered how much it would cost to have it rebuilt.

* * *

Dear Ginnie:
My hands shake a lot today, and my skin is the color of pale mud. We are reaching the end of the sea crossing, Mr. Friendly Doctor and I, just as the timetable in my pocket said we would.

This has really been a long and surprisingly good letter to you, Ginnie, but I wanted you to understand the silence and the ghosts you will be living with. You are very powerful and beautiful and when you hear the silence, Ginnie, when you touch ultimate emptiness, hold steady and still.

I don't know when I shall write to you again. When the steamer is made fast and the gangplank is lowered I shall find a special car waiting for me to begin the curious Life in Death which you have condemned me to. But if, after my death, I loop around the world, if they carry my fifty-yard-long phallus in procession with a star at its tip to signify my rebirth, it will be you, Ginnie, who will conceive of me.

A Note About the Author

Elizabeth A. Scott was born in Southampton, England, just in time to catch the second half of World War II. She remembers her childhood as a time spent daydreaming, kicking pebbles, and writing stories. She was introduced to the sea at an early age and spent as many summers as she could on the isle of Jersey. Wanting very badly to live in London, she worked in a bank, as a barmaid, and eventually as a governess. When the family she worked for came to America, she journeyed with them; when they returned to Europe, she chose to stay. Since then, Miss Scott has had various jobs in the advertising and decorating fields. But the jobs are temporary, affording the opportunity to spend long summer stretches in Maine by the sea where she wrote *The Rim of the Tub*, her first novel.

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